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Hegel on the Modern Arts

Benjamin Rutter

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HEGEL ON THE MODERN ARTS

Debates over the “end of art” have tended to obscure Hegel’s work on the arts themselves. Benjamin Rutter opens this study with a defense of art’s indispensability to Hegel’s conception of modernity; he then seeks to reorient the discussion toward the distinctive values of painting, poetry, and the novel. Working carefully through Hegel’s four lecture series on aesthetics, he identifies the expressive possibilities particular to each medium. Thus, Dutch genre scenes animate the everyday with an appearance of vitality; metaphor frees language from prose; and Goethe’s lyrics revive the banal routines of love with imagination and wit. Rutter’s important study reconstructs Hegel’s view not only of modern art but of modern life and will appeal to philosophers, literary theorists, and art historians alike.

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BENJAMIN RUTTER



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For Missy

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ABBREVIATIONS

Citations are generally given from *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, ed. Eva Moldenhauer and K.M. Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970–1) in the form of volume:page following a citation from one of the translations listed below. I have altered translations where necessary.

- 1820 *Vorlesung über Ästhetik: Berlin 1820/21: eine Nachschrift*, ed. H. Schneider. New York: Lang, 1995. I cite each of the five lecture transcripts by the manuscript page number (Ms.).
- 1823 *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Kunst: Berlin 1823*, ed. A. Gethmann-Siefert. Hamburg: Meiner, 1998. I cite by the manuscript page number (Ms.).
- 1826a *Philosophie der Kunst oder Ästhetik: nach Hegel, im Sommer 1826. Mitschrift Friedrich Carl Hermann Victor von Kehler*, ed. A. Gethmann-Siefert and B. Collenberg-Plotnikov. München: Fink, 2004. I cite by the manuscript page number (Ms.).
- 1826b *Philosophie der Kunst. Vorlesung von 1826* [Mitschrift P. von der Pfordten], ed. A. Gethmann-Siefert, J.-I. Kwon, and K. Berr. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004. I cite by the manuscript page number (Ms.).
- 1828 Liebelt *Mitschrift* of the 1828 lecture series. Portions of the unpublished manuscript were generously provided to me by Prof. Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert. I cite by the manuscript page number (Ms.).
- LFA *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T.M. Knox. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999.
Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik = *Werke*, vols. XIII, XIV, XV.

- LHP *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E.S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1896.
Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie = Werke, vols. XVIII, XIX, XX.
- LPG *Hegel: Lectures on the Proofs of the Existence of God*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. = *Werke*, vol. XVII
- LPH *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1991.
Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte = Werke, vol. XII.
- LPR *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. III, ed. Peter C. Hodgson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. = *Werke*, vol. XVII
- PhS *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.
Die Phänomenologie des Geistes = Werke, vol. III.
- PM *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. W. Wallace and A.V. Miller. New York: Oxford University Press, 1971.
Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse (1830) (Part Three) = *Werke*, vol. x.
- PR *Philosophy of Right*, trans. H.B. Nesbit. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts = Werke, vol. VII.
- SL *Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller. Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1969.
Wissenschaft der Logik = Werke, vols. v, VI.

INTRODUCTION

Like many people I know, I enjoy the work of the literary critic James Wood, and I have enjoyed it all the more since coming to think of him as the contemporary critic closest in spirit to what I think of as Hegel's philosophy of art. On the one hand, Wood has developed or revived certain critical views with clear antecedents in Hegel's lectures. His account in *The Irresponsible Self* of the distinction between what he calls the comedy of forgiveness and the comedy of correction, for example, and of the superiority of the former to the latter, closely resembles Hegel's own effort to distinguish the reconciling power of Aristophanic laughter from the cynicism of, for instance, Molière. Meanwhile, the defense of a modest literary realism articulated in the *Broken Estate* and expanded in *How Fiction Works* – an account of fiction's origins in and responsibility to the real world that manages to acknowledge the ultimate artifice and unreality of the form – strikes just the sort of balance Hegel sought between the competing demands, in his own era, of artistic virtuosity and a sort of bourgeois naturalism. Wood himself, who refers to Hegel only occasionally, would no doubt be surprised to learn this. And there are of course endless ways in which they differ. (For one, Hegel didn't have much interest in the novel.) In any case, it is only the principles Wood holds in common with Hegel that have struck me, as it is the way in which his reckoning of the contemporary art of fiction, of its various traps and possibilities, recalls Hegel's own appraisal of the situation of German literature at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Wood's essay "Jonathan Franzen and the 'Social Novel'" received a good deal of attention in the literary world, in part because *The Corrections*, the novel it addressed, had been a recent bestseller, and in part because it forms a sort of companion piece to an ever better-known essay, "Hysterical Realism," also reprinted in *The Irresponsible*

Self, in which Wood states his brief against the maximalist tradition (Pynchon, DeLillo, Foster Wallace, *et al.*) in post-war, chiefly American fiction. In 1996, Wood recalls, Franzen had written a well-regarded essay in which he lamented the decline of what he called the “social novel,” the sort of challenging, sophisticated, and yet thoroughly public work of fiction that, in Franzen’s view, had dominated the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – Dickens, Tolstoy, Proust – but had come to seem an impossibility in a culture in which the novelist’s project of bringing “social news” had been taken up by newspapers (and television stations) themselves, and in which “literary fiction” was, in the end, one genre among others. Wood, in response, points to the curious premise of this disappointment, to the fact that “Franzen establishes a kind of competition between the novel and society, almost an equivalence. The novel must somehow match the culture, equal its potency.” Wood finds this ambition overwrought and likely to make for bad art, for if it cannot equal the culture, “then the novel has somehow lost, and must fatten itself up,” must become *Gravity’s Rainbow*.¹

Wood might seem to veer at this point from Hegel’s position. It is precisely Hegel, after all, the philosopher of *Geist* and the inventor of philosophical art history, whom we should expect to second Franzen’s demand, to call for the social work of art as the vessel of a culture’s deepest concerns, its social news. And, indeed, throughout much of human history, Hegel thinks, this is what the work of art has been: not only a match for the culture, a mirror in the road, but the matrix of its self-understanding as a coherent form of life. Homer, to take one of Hegel’s favorite examples, does not merely transcribe the facts of Greek religion; it is he himself who creates that religion, and who in “giving the Greeks their gods” also gives them their world. As readers of the *Aesthetics* know, however, art’s power to reflect a culture’s concerns dims significantly following the Reformation, and in an age of newspapers and bureaucracies, it has in some important ways a much slighter role to play. Many of Hegel’s readers have felt it has no more role to play at all – that art is over, in other words, on his view – and the impetus for the present study has been a desire to work out a satisfactory reply to this traditional and in many ways unsatisfying account of Hegel on the modern arts.

Wood ends up admiring *The Corrections*, a work whose best passages “constitut[e] a fine case for the vivacity of another kind of book” – not the social novel, with its Homeric ambition to comprehend the

1 James Wood, *The Irresponsible Self* (New York: FSG, 2004), 198.

whole, but “the novel of character,” a form whose psychological depth shares something of the inwardness of lyric poetry, the literary form to which Hegel consigns his greatest hopes for modern art.² But Wood and Hegel are closest in their accounts not of the achievements but of the failures of contemporary fiction.

Among Franzen’s sources for the quixotic notion that the novel might stand in competition with the culture, with the newspapers and television outlets Hegel would refer to as the world of “prose,” was, by his own admission, the work of Don DeLillo. DeLillo, according to Wood, radicalizes the grandeur of the novel’s mission until it becomes almost unrecognizable: “at its root level,” Wood finds him saying in a 1997 essay, “fiction is a kind of religious fanaticism with elements of obsession, superstition and awe. Such qualities will sooner or later state their adversarial relationship to history.”³ It is difficult to know how to take such pronouncements, and Wood suspects a certain lack of seriousness here, attributing to DeLillo the “idea of the novelist as a kind of Frankfurt School entertainer – a cultural theorist, fighting the culture with dialectical devilry.”⁴ It is just this mix of outsized ambition and uncertain seriousness that Hegel sees in Friedrich Schlegel, the theorist and *litterateur* who made such a vigorous mark on the German literary and cultural scene in the last decade of the eighteenth century. For DeLillo, the novel must become a vehicle for theory if it is to take on the culture. Likewise, the project of Jena Romanticism was to invigorate literature by destroying its distinction from philosophy. The *bête noire* for Hegel as for Wood is the ironist, the artist who wants us to take his subversions as a serious project and yet who knows himself that it is easier to destroy than to create.

A second and related form that literature assumes in its moments of crisis is the encyclopedia of trivialities that Wood calls hysterical realism and that Hegel refers to as subjective humor. The passages in which they poke fun at this approach are strikingly similar in tone. Pynchon and DeLillo write “books of great self-consciousness with no selves in them; curiously arrested books which know a thousand different things – How to make the best Indonesian fish curry! The sonics of the trombone! The drug market of Detroit! The history of strip cartoons! – but do not know a single human being.”⁵ This sort of “portable smartness,” as Wood calls it, is what Hegel finds in the modern German novel. He

² *Ibid.*, 209. ³ *Ibid.*, 198. The title of the DeLillo essay is “Power and History.”

⁴ *Irresponsible Self*, 201. ⁵ *Ibid.*, 202.

chides Goethe, his favorite, for the digressiveness of *Elective Affinities*, its treatment of “the parks, the *tableaux vivants*, and the swinging of the pendulum, the feel of metals, the headaches, the whole picture, derived from chemistry.” Likewise, “in order always to have new material, [the comic novelist] Jean Paul looked into books of the most varied kind, botanical, legal, philosophical, descriptive of travel, noted at once what struck him and wrote down the passing fancies it suggested.” In general, “he brought together the most heterogeneous material – Brazilian plants and the old Supreme Court of the Empire.”⁶

A third correspondence concerns the figure known to the German aesthetic tradition as the “beautiful soul.” Franzen arrives in his essay at the conclusion that the dream of the social novel must be abandoned and that the modern writer’s project will devolve upon the integrity of her creations: “To write sentences of such authenticity that refuge can be taken in them: isn’t this enough? Isn’t it a lot?”⁷ Wood is sympathetic, he allows, to this “aesthetic” solution to the problem of the novel, and Hegel would be as well – particularly where the pursuit of style assumes the form of a commitment to an artistic project, however minor, that might win the writer a measure of trust from her public and distance her from the ironist, with his eye for the main chance. (The problem of authenticity, as we will see, is central to Hegel’s account of the modern condition of the arts.) But Wood now registers a worry that finds a deep echo in Hegel. In rejecting the project of the social novel, Franzen seems to have rejected the very idea of distinction in the arts. “I resist, finally, the notion of literature as a noble higher calling,” he writes; “my belief in manners would make it difficult for me to explain to my brother, who is a fan of Michael Crichton, that the work I’m doing is simply *better* than Crichton’s.” But having reduced his theory of the novel to the pursuit of style, and then having disclaimed the value of that style itself, Franzen is left with very little – with a view, as Wood puts it, “starved down precisely to the ‘refuge’ of a few authentic ‘sentences.’”⁸ Refuge, authenticity, starvation: Wood’s account reprises the dialectic of the beautiful soul, the figure embodied for Hegel in the tender but listless beauty of Novalis’s poetry and in the poet’s death, at an early age, from consumption. Convinced of his own goodness and intelligence, but afraid to sully

6 LFA 297, 295–6.

7 *Irresponsible Self*, 197.

8 *Ibid.*, 200.

this by asserting it in the marketplace – by claiming his superiority to Michael Crichton or accepting Oprah’s endorsement – the beautiful soul retires and retreats.

The correspondences are not exact, but we can recognize in Wood’s reply to Franzen several of the same basic possibilities Hegel presents in his account of “The Dissolution of Romantic Art”: the ironist in DeLillo and Schlegel; the humorist in Pynchon and Jean Paul; the beautiful soul in Franzen and Novalis; and finally the possibility of a “novel of character” grounded in the fact that “consciousness is the true Stendhalian mirror, reflecting helplessly the random angles of the age.”⁹ Whether or not we can find an analogue to that latter view in the *Aesthetics* and its account of post-romantic lyric poetry remains an open question. Still, the sense of affinity between Wood and Hegel is difficult to resist. And what are we to make of that? A modest claim to the relevance of Hegel’s philosophy of art.

9 Ibid., 201.

THE PROBLEM OF A MODERN ART

That Hegel bears witness in his lectures on aesthetics not to a cessation of artistic activity but to a decline in its significance for human self-understanding is quite certain. Less evident is the extent and nature of this decline. The debate over the proper interpretation of the “end of art,” in other words, centers not on the likelihood that plays and paintings will cease to be produced (or even, in some narrow sense, enjoyed) but on the possibility that their production will largely cease to matter to their intended audience, the cultivated European publics of the nineteenth century. Interested non-specialists have often subscribed to this pessimistic view.¹ Scholars of the *Aesthetics*, meanwhile, have long divided on the issue, some defending the pessimistic account, others retrieving from the half-dozen editions and several thousand pages of the lectures the sense of some enduring role for art.² If the idea that art has no real place in Hegel’s mature system is still defended,³ the balance of opinion has shifted in the past decade in favor of a more optimistic

- 1 Most prominently, Arthur Danto; see below. Also, Anthony Cascardi: “Hegel says that art is no longer possible in the present age,” *Consequences of Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 117.
- 2 Stephen Bungay, *Beauty and Truth: A Study of Hegel’s Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), and Dieter Henrich, “Kunst und Kunst Philosophie der Gegenwart” in H.R. Jauss, ed., *Poetik und Hermeneutik 1* (Munich: Eidos Verlag, 1964; translated as “Art and Philosophy of Art Today: Reflections with Reference to Hegel” in Richard E. Amacher and Victor Lange, eds., *New Perspectives in German Literary Criticism: A Collection of Essays* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979]), take the dim view, as does Rüdiger Bubner, *Innovations of Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003 [1995]), 254. H.S. Harris was an early optimist, “The Resurrection of Art,” *Owl of Minerva*, 16, 1 (1984), as was William Desmond, *Art and the Absolute* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1986), 75.
- 3 Martin Donougho, “Art and History: Hegel on the End, the Beginning, and the Future of Art” in S. Houlgate, ed., *Hegel and the Arts* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007). Donougho’s nuanced, interesting article entertains a range of positions,

appraisal.⁴ More than one commentator has recently asserted the ongoing indispensability of the arts on a properly Hegelian conception of the modern world, and the prospect of some rough convergence of opinion on such an old question is encouraging.⁵

Such a consensus, should it appear, would require reinforcement along two lines. Commentators interested in sparing Hegel the infamy of declaring an end to art have amassed a good deal of textual evidence that contravenes the pessimistic reading, but there has been no concerted effort to rebut the apparently, and not implausibly, Hegelian arguments on which that view is founded. Second, there has been a general reluctance to put forth a positive account of art's ongoing value: to identify the distinctive contributions in virtue of which the creation of and engagement with original works of art (not just museum pieces) remains on Hegel's view an essential activity. I explore these distinctive contributions in the cases of painting and literature in [chapters 2–5](#).⁶ The

eventually settling on a fairly pessimistic view. Allen Speight, "Hegel and Aesthetics: The Practice and 'Pastness' of Art" in F.C. Beiser, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), likewise offers tentative suggestions but is sympathetic to Donougho's account.

- 4 Among commentators who have argued recently (on widely varying grounds) that art remains vital are Robert Wicks, "Hegel's Aesthetics: An Overview" in F.C. Beiser, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); S. Houlgate, "Hegel and the 'End' of Art," *Owl of Minerva*, 29, 1 (1997); A. Gethmann-Siefert, "Einleitung: Gestalt und Wirkung von Hegels Ästhetik" in A. Gethmann-Siefert, ed., *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Kunst: Berlin 1823* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1998), xxiv, clxxxvi–ccxv, and "Einleitung" in A. Gethmann-Siefert and B. Collenberg-Plotnikov, eds., *Philosophie der Kunst oder Ästhetik: nach Hegel, im Sommer 1826* (Munich: Fink, 2004), xi–xlix; K.D. Magnus, "Spirit's Symbolic Self-Presentation in Art: A Reading of Hegel's Aesthetics," *Owl of Minerva* 30, 2 (1998), 155–207; K. Berger, *A Theory of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 89; Brian Etter, "Hegel's Aesthetic and the Possibility of Art Criticism" in William Maker, ed., *Hegel and Aesthetics* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000), 40; Kirk Pillow, *Sublime Understanding: Aesthetic Reflection in Kant and Hegel* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000); Robert Pippin, "What Was Abstract Art?", *Critical Inquiry*, 29 (2002), 1–24, and "The Absence of Aesthetics in Hegel's Aesthetics" in Beiser, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*; Ido Geiger, "Is Art a Thing of the Past? The Political Work of Art between Hegel and Schiller," *Idealistic Studies*, 35 (2–3) (Summer/Fall 2005), 173–97; and Terry Pinkard, "Symbolic, Classical and Romantic Art" in Houlgate, ed., *Hegel and the Arts*.
- 5 Pippin: an "indispensable elemen[t] of modern life" ("What Was Abstract Art?", 20n32); Pinkard: "crucial and irreplaceable" ("Symbolic, Classical and Romantic Art," 20); Gethmann-Siefert: art retains "ihre unverzichtbare kulturelle Funktion" ("Einleitung [1826]," xlvii–ii); Geiger: "an essential human need in modernity" ("Is Art a Thing of the Past?", 174).
- 6 Unfortunately, I have neither the space nor the education to offer an appraisal of Hegel's theory of music, the third of the romantic arts. For an excellent treatment of the subject, see R.T. Eldridge, "Hegel on Music" in Houlgate, ed., *Hegel and the Arts*.

present chapter is first critical, taking up and responding to variations of the pessimistic reading, and then constructive, laying the ground for a defense of art by establishing the sense in which it remains subordinate to philosophy (“Art and philosophy”); pausing to account for Hegel’s often valedictory tone (“Hegel’s pessimism”); and finally proceeding to outline art’s distinctive value (“Building the case for indispensability”). In closing, I consider the charge that Hotho’s editing distorts Hegel’s view (“Does Hegel change his mind?”) and the objection that modern art is, in Hegel’s view, necessarily exhausted, or “post historical” (“post-romantic art”).

The pessimistic reading

That the lectures on aesthetics have given rise to debate among interpreters is hardly surprising when we consider how conflicted is the view of modern art which they project.⁷ To judge from the Introduction, art’s loss of authority in an age of reflection is of interest for primarily “phenomenological” reasons, that is, insofar as the age of art prepares for and effects the transition to philosophical forms of thought. The fact that Hegel fails even to consider, much less resolve, the issue of art’s ongoing relevance certainly encourages the notion that it has become a “thing of the past” (LFA 11, XIII:25). Five hundred pages later, in the opening remarks on the romantic artform,⁸ the sentiment is substantially unchanged: “the culmination of the romantic in general,” Hegel announces, is the final uncoupling of content and form, “the divergence . . . whereby art sublates itself and brings home to our minds that we must acquire higher forms for the apprehension of truth than those which art is in a position to supply” (LFA 529, XIV:142). It is certainly puzzling, given this programmatic statement, to find Hegel praising Goethe’s *West-östliche Divan* as “the highest that poetry can accomplish” (1826a, Ms. 376) and pointing to it as the bellwether of a new and vital literary humanism (LFA 606–11, XIV:237–42). Our question

7 Though I will occasionally use the term “modern art” to refer to post-Reformation art in general (e.g. in the chapter on painting) I will generally have in mind the Goethezeit (1770–1830), the period which saw “the appearance of genuinely living literature [*lebendiger Poesie*]” (LFA 20, XIII:37) in the *Sturm und Drang*, and was then shaped by revolution and Romanticism. The term “post-romantic” will refer to the art of the first decades of the nineteenth century.

8 I will use “romantic” to refer to the art of the Christian era (Hegel’s sense of the term) and “Romantic” to refer to the literary and philosophical output of German Romanticism.

cannot be resolved by direct appeal to what Hegel had (according to Hotho) said on the subject of post-romantic art. As we will see below, his views evolved somewhat over the course of the 1820s. In addition to reconstructing this evolution, our task is to clarify the apparent confusion by appeal to more general considerations.

An advantage of the articles on the *Aesthetics* that Dieter Henrich published in the late 1960s is that they openly address, as Bungay's and Danto's contributions do not, the discrepant evidence just mentioned. Henrich believes he can dismiss this enthusiasm as a failure of nerve, however, for on his reading, the ascendancy of philosophy since the Reformation not only suggests but requires, for Hegel, art's irrelevance.⁹ Part of his account relies on a philological claim to which we will return below, but the thrust of the argument is that the very idea of vitality in the modern arts should strike us as "strictly incompatible with the systematic structure of Hegel's aesthetics."¹⁰ On Henrich's view, modern art is both necessarily *partial* and necessarily *redundant*. Art's incompleteness, or partiality, derives from the fact that it can no longer display to us our "highest" concerns. This is certainly a fair presentation of Hegel's view. In particular, neither the basic metaphysical certainties nor the central social institutions that undergird our experience of the world can be comprehensively presented, he thinks, to sense and feeling. Greek sculptors and Christian painters managed the former by depicting the gods themselves; but the modern understanding of "the Divine," having centrally to do with human freedom, cannot have its portrait taken. Likewise tragedy, the art in which Greeks displayed to themselves the legitimacy of their founding social institutions, no longer plays a legitimizing role, having become in the romantic era an art devoted to the study of individual character in a world bereft of binding institutions. The point here is simply that modern art's partiality may be admitted without damage to its indispensability: the fact that painters and poets cannot address *all* our concerns does not imply that they can address *none* of them. In the final lecture series, Hegel acknowledges that the modern artist's treatment of "partial objects" means that the meaning his work conveys "can only be something partial." Nonetheless, "the satisfaction in such

9 Henrich, "The Contemporary Relevance of Hegel's Aesthetics" in M. Inwood, ed., *Hegel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 201.

10 Henrich, "Kunst und Kunstphilosophie der Gegenwart," 16; my translation.

partial objects can go further, reach deeper; it can progress, in other words, toward a state of felt intimacy [*zur Innigkeit*]” (1828, Ms. 101a).

Henrich’s second and more damaging contention is that modern art is necessarily redundant, that it merely reiterates, accessibly and with local inflection, a body of speculative propositions expressed with greater clarity and rigor by the philosophers. (Art “playfully introduce[s] into the peripheral, into the incidental, the certainty that the world cannot ultimately be characterized by rupture and estrangement,” he writes; Goethe’s poetry secures for us a mere “confirmation” of the self-understanding secured by the professorate.¹¹) This is a much more serious challenge to the indispensability view; if modern artists are left simply to “confirm” or repeat the deliverances of theoretical philosophy in harmony and metaphor, it is hard to see why such a practice, whether or not it persists, is in any way meaningful or necessary. Can Hegel avoid Henrich’s conclusion? Given the many versions of his claim that art “falls apart” in the late romantic period, thereby “sublating itself” in favor of “higher forms for the apprehension of truth,” and that philosophy has come to stand “higher” than art and religion, there is reason to think that Henrich is right. A typical Prussian civil servant – someone who has been to university, maintains friendships with cultivated peers, and reads the paper – already holds the keys to his own freedom, on this reading of Hegel, and his engagement with works of art proceeds *from*, rather than aiming *toward*, a reflective satisfaction with the basic outlines of modern life.

In the end, however, Henrich’s article is more the expression of a worry than the elaboration of an argument. In particular, he does not show how the demand that works of art must be broadly consistent with Hegel’s philosophical position – must not, in other words, characterize the world as a place of “rupture and estrangement” – makes these works essentially unserious, i.e. “playful” and redundant. In fact, I want to suggest that the suggestion of such a redundancy would seem to rest upon a distinctly un-Hegelian conception of the relationship between the content and the form, the meaning (*Bedeutung*) and the sensuous embodiment (*Gestalt*), of a work of art. I shall then go on to argue that the sense of “sublation” at issue in the transition from art to religion and philosophy has little to do with the notion of redundancy.

In the passage cited above, Henrich suggests that post-romantic art will be left to “introduce” a given “certainty” (namely, the achievement

11 Henrich, “Contemporary Relevance,” 202.

of freedom and reconciliation) into a given realm of life (“the peripheral” and “the incidental,” i.e. the everyday life of the bourgeoisie). In fact, as I will argue in later chapters, there is something right about this way of characterizing the virtues of Dutch painting and of some German literature. The problem is that Henrich’s emphasis on the triviality of this project seems to depend upon an undialectical understanding of the relationship between meaning and embodiment. In other words, he seems to think that the understanding of freedom (the “certainty”) realized in the artistic exploration of the everyday (“introduced” into “the incidental”) is not only the *same* understanding in each work of art, but the same understanding as that expressed in the *Encyclopedia*. But this seems to approach a view like Baumgarten’s, on which aesthetic intuition is a more or less blurred approximation of conceptual thought. Even if it made sense to think of the abstract content or meaning of Goethe’s *West-östliche Divan* as something like the denial of “rupture and estrangement” and the assertion of being-at-home in the everyday (and that is already a more abstract account than Hegel offers in his discussions of that work) it is nonetheless characteristic of Hegel’s view that the interaction of this content with the particular features of Goethe’s project (the nature of modern love, the dialogue with medieval Persian poets) would yield a picture of freedom that is necessarily distinct from, albeit compatible with, those of another poet (Schiller) or philosopher (Hegel).¹² What remains open to Henrich is to argue that modern art will tend, on Hegel’s view, to *fail*, that the poet’s efforts to see his life as a self-determining whole simply cannot succeed amid the banalities of his daily life. But this is not what Henrich argues, and his claim that the preeminence of philosophical account-giving is

¹² This objection is inspired by Pippin’s argument in “Absence of Aesthetics,” though he himself does not apply it to Henrich’s contention. Pippin’s claim in this essay is that Hegel offers no stand-alone theory of aesthetic experience within his theory of art because aesthetic experience and the appreciation of artistic meaning cannot, in his view, come apart, cannot be any more than pragmatically distinguished from one another. The essay’s value is that it supports this claim not so much by reference to the *Aesthetics* as by presenting the artwork as analogous, in Hegel’s view, to an action or a knowledge claim. “In neither [of the two latter cases] is there a ‘two-stage’ process,” Pippin writes, “neither the conceptualization of independently acquired sensory material, nor an inner intention functioning as distinct cause, initiating a subsequent bodily movement as one might kick a ball to start it rolling” (405). Accordingly, “art-making is not an incidental or contingent or merely illustrative *expression* of an already achieved self-knowledge, any more than action is the result of or expression of a distinct inner intention” (411). But this view is just what Henrich’s worry seems to presuppose: artists merely depositing a fixed and given notion of freedom into the various receptacles (work, family, love, friendship) of

“strictly incompatible” with originality in the arts seems to presuppose an unappealing dualism of content and form.¹³

Against Henrich, there are in fact systematic reasons to think that art will retain some vitality in the modern era. But before turning to these we should consider what is perhaps the best-known defense of the pessimistic reading. Where Henrich’s proposal is principally conceptual, Arthur Danto’s is grounded largely in a single passage from the Introduction that drew his attention because it strikingly approximated some of his own views, developed in the 1960s, on the situation of modern art. The passage is well known, and any defense of art’s indispensability must address it:

In all these respects art, considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past. Thereby it has lost for us genuine truth and life, and has rather been transferred into our ideas instead of maintaining its earlier necessity in reality and occupying its higher place. What is now aroused in us by works of art is not just immediate enjoyment but our judgment also, since we subject to our intellectual consideration (i) the content of art, and (ii) the work of art’s means of presentation, and the appropriateness or inappropriateness of both to one another. The philosophy of art is therefore a greater need in our day than it was in days when art by itself as art yielded full satisfaction. Art invites us to intellectual consideration, and that not for the purpose of creating art again, but for knowing philosophically what art is. (LFA 11, XIII:25–6)

modern life. Pippin points to Hegel’s formulation of the general problem of inner/outer dualism in the lesser *Logic* (*Hegel’s Logic: Being Part One of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* [1830], trans. William Wallace [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975], 197, §140, VIII:274) and then supports the analogy between art and action by appealing to the *Phenomenology*’s reference to an action as a *Werk*. The simplest way to establish the connection, however, is to cite the *Zusatz* to the section: “There certainly may be individual cases where the malice of outward circumstances frustrates well-meant designs, and disturbs the execution of the best-laid plans,” but “the lying vanity which consoles itself with the feeling of inward excellence may be confronted with the words of the Gospel: ‘By their fruits ye shall know them.’ That grand saying applies primarily in a moral and religious aspect, but it also holds good in reference to performances in art and science. The keen eye of a teacher who perceives in his pupil decided evidences of talent, may lead him to state his opinion that a Raphael or a Mozart lies hidden in the boy; and the result will show how far such an opinion was well-founded” (199, §140Z, VIII:277).

- 13 Collingwood’s *Principles of Art* defends a much stronger version of this view, the idea that a work is identical with its content or conception. “A work of art need not be what we should call a real thing,” he writes. “It may be what we call an imaginary thing ... [one] completely created when it has been created as a thing whose only place is in the artist’s mind” (*The Principles of Art* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958 (1938)], 130).

Placing particular emphasis upon the final sentence of this passage,¹⁴ Danto's suggestion is that art participates, in a certain way, in its own demise: "the end of art consists," in Hegel's view as in his, "in the coming to awareness of the true philosophical nature of art."¹⁵ Henrich had claimed that art ends in ceding authority to philosophy. Danto sharpens this account by suggesting that art gives way to philosophy by creating the need for the philosophy of art.¹⁶ Danto deserves credit for drawing attention to this need and to the value of its satisfaction.¹⁷ But on what grounds does he declare art at an "end"? True, it has lost the vitality it once enjoyed, but this is simply the familiar idea that it no longer satisfies our highest aims. The context of the passage makes it clear that Hegel's concern is ultimately to defend the legitimacy of the philosophy of art itself.¹⁸ Doing so involves him in a discussion of art's diminished authority not in order to establish art's disappearance into philosophy but because it is this diminution that makes possible and necessary, and thus legitimizes, the philosophy of art itself. Danto, then, has no more success establishing modern art's dispensability than does Henrich. In fact, he appears to hold a much more explicit version of the view, implicit in Henrich, on which form and content are dissociable in Hegel's account of absolute spirit.¹⁹ It is no surprise, then,

14 He calls this "the line in Hegel that gave support to [his] own views," *After the End of Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 13.

15 *After the End of Art*, 34.

16 Danto is careful to say in response to his critics that Hegel is not centrally concerned with philosophical art itself. "The End of Art: A Philosophical Defense," *History and Theory* 37 (December 1998), 134.

17 Hegel explains a few pages on that spirit "subjects art to philosophic treatment" because it "is only satisfied when it has permeated all products of its activity with thought and so only then has made them genuinely its own" (LFA 13). Danto works up a similar account, drawing on the *Phenomenology's* notion of *absolutes Wissen* in *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 113. When Hegel says that the need for the philosophy of art has nothing to do with a desire to "arouse [*hervorrufen*]" it again (1823, Ms. 6), I take him to mean that the philosophy of art cannot reverse its decline, cannot return art to its golden age.

18 The passage appears in a section of Hotho's notes entitled "The Worthiness of Art to be Treated Scientifically" (1823, Ms. 4; cf. LFA 7, xiii:20) which sets out to defend philosophical aesthetics against both pre-Kantian views of art as trivial ("fleeting play") or instrumental (mere "decoration") and Platonic-Rousseauian suspicions of art as a possibly dangerous illusion (*Schein*).

19 Borrowing Kant's remark that examples are "the go-cart of the understanding," Danto suggests that artworks are for Hegel "the go-cart of spirit," the ladder that is kicked away (*The Abuse of Beauty* [Chicago: Open Court, 2003], 94).

that the advent of higher-order, philosophical accounts of experience render lower-order, artistic accounts obsolete in his view.²⁰

Art and philosophy

How else might we conceive of modern art's subordination? Hegel does not use Henrich's language of confirmation or reiteration, but he does speak at several points of the self-transcendence or sublation of romantic art (employing the portmanteau concept comprising preservation, cancellation, and metaphoric elevation). Art's *elevation* to the realm of philosophic thought is the final moment of a progress that comprises both its *negation* at the hands of religion and, in some sense to be determined, its *preservation* as art. It is natural to wonder here how a redundant and dispensable artworld can have been "preserved" in any relevant sense, though it is also natural to consider this sort of objection schematic. To flesh it out, I would like to point to a distinction between the meaning of sublation in the philosophy of spirit and the meaning of sublation in the philosophy of history. In particular, we can contrast the fate of a given historical moment (ancient Chinese civilization) with that of a given moment in the development of objective spirit (family life) as recounted in the *Philosophy of Right*. I will then argue that the self-overcoming of the practice of art resembles the sublation of family life more closely than the sublation of China.

20 Perhaps the deeper reason that Danto attributes to Hegel the pessimistic view I find untenable is that he has relatively little to say about the question that most excited and stimulated Hegel in his lectures: the question of art's aim and value. It is possible to list, as Donougho has done ("Art and History," 199–202), various points of contact between Danto's and Hegel's views of art and its history. But consider how different their basic orientations are. In Danto's view, the history of Western painting from Giotto to Courbet can be organized around the guiding project, the "metanarrative," of imitation. As a descriptive claim, this may make a certain amount of sense, but to Hegel, who is interested not in descriptive accounts but in the relationship of art to "the Divine," to the essential questions human cultures have faced, such an approach would seem – did seem (see LFA 41–6) – perfectly trivial. As Brigitte Hilmer observes, "it is an open question whether art ever had [its] 'higher' function" in Danto's view ("Being Hegelian after Danto," *History and Theory* 37 (December 1998), 74). See her discussion of the way in which Danto tends to slide from talk of art as a form of knowledge of human life to talk of art as a much narrower form of knowledge about art (73). See also Danto's claim that "the historical importance of art" consists in "the fact that it makes philosophy of art possible and important" (*Philosophical Disenfranchisement*, 107, 111). For criticism of the philosophy of art history Danto defends, see Noël Carroll, "The End of Art?", *History and Theory*, 37 (December 1998), 17–29.

Viewed retrospectively, Hegel argues, a historical people can be understood in terms of its distinctive project: namely, the development of that unique “principle [*Prinzip*]” (PR §344, VII:505) which animates its cultural-political ethos. As the concrete illustration of one possibility of ethical life, the nation serves as an example to its peers and successors, and thereby donates its principle to the history of spirit.²¹ The nation is “preserved” in this donation alone, for once its distinctive task is discharged and its “epoch has passed,” it “no longer counts in world history” (PR §347, VII:506). The principle of Chinese civilization, to take one example, is “the immediate unity of the substantial spirit and the individual,” a unity which is “equivalent to the spirit of the family” (LPH 120, XII:152). Under the guidance of an imperial patriarch, in other words, the Chinese nation understands itself as a single kinship group. But while Chinese civilization is preserved insofar as its animating principle is taken up and incorporated into subsequent political theory – specifically, into Hegel’s defense of constitutional monarchy – the nation itself ceases to matter and the phrase “modern China” remains a contradiction in terms. Hegel’s discussion of the movement of world history bears some resemblance to his account of the end of *art* history at the close of the romantic era.²² Is there a parallel to be drawn? Perhaps. Art could certainly be said to donate a certain principle to the development of absolute spirit, for the form of speculative thought is marked by a “perfect self-identity” evidently modeled on the notion of artistic beauty (LFA 984, xv:255). Such a donation would obviously not require the enduring relevance of art itself. Asked for an account of the element of preservation in art’s self-overcoming, then, a defender of Henrich’s position might appeal to what I am calling the historical model of sublation. After all, the form of philosophical argument has, in some sense, already absorbed and assimilated the artist’s interest in the coherence of content and form.

A rival model of sublation, however, is suggested by the development of the family not as a stage of world history but as a moment of “objective spirit,” that is, as a basic institution of social life. Like the

21 “The nation ... is given the task of implementing this principle in the course of the self-development of the world spirit’s self-consciousness” (PR §347, VII:505–6).

22 As a nation enters its “period of ... decline and fall,” there arises “within it ... a higher principle which is simply the negative of its own” and which “signifies the spirit’s transition to the higher principle and hence the transition of world history to *another* nation.” As in the case of art failing to satisfy our “highest needs,” Hegel now adds that “the previous nation has lost its absolute interest” (PR §347 A, VII:506).

Chinese version of the state, the ethical institution of the family generates a range of norms (the bonds of marriage and of parent–child relations) which prove, in their development, unstable and in need of deeper sources of authority. (For one, the legitimacy of familial norms rests on the sharing of sentiments rather than of reasons; for another, the inequality of the relationship between parent and child stands in conflict with modern egalitarianism.) Like that of the Chinese state, the normative authority of family life is thus sublated, donating that principle to the development of objective spirit which is then taken up and preserved in the structures of civil society.²³ And yet it is clear that the preservation of family life is not limited to this donation. Hegel does not follow Plato in dissolving the ethical significance of the family for the reproduction of society; rather, as his appreciation of the seriousness of divorce suggests, he believes that the family remains an important source of the emotional health of the individual.²⁴ In contrast to the decline of China, then, we have here a model of sublation on which the supersession of one institution by another entails not its redundancy but rather the circumscription (or “partiality”) of its claims to normative authority.²⁵

Is art, then, a historical phenomenon capable of redundancy or an institution whose existence is in some way required by an account of human freedom and in that respect suprahistorical? Given Hegel’s bold decision to integrate a theory of art’s history into the theory of art itself, it is inevitably both of these, a historical phenomenon that can undergo a sort of exhaustion and a basic human possibility immanent in all human history (and thus in some sense outside of it).²⁶ At the end of this chapter, I will suggest a way in which art, considered

23 Namely, in the “estates” that organize social life (PR §203, VII:355), the civil society of which “the individual becomes *a son*” (PR §238, VII:386), and the “corporations” that guarantee the family a “firm basis” in the economy (PR §253, VII:395).

24 PR §176. Marriage can promote a valuable sort of freedom by allowing us to reinterpret immediate and irrational desires for sex as the mediated and incipiently rational need for love (PR §176 Z, VII:330).

25 Parents have limited rights over children, the authority of which “dissolves” once these children reach the age of majority (PR §177, VII:330). As I hope is clear, I do not mean to suggest by the analogy I am drawing any substantive resemblance between artistic practice and family life. The issue is merely the sense in which art could conceivably become redundant or “no longer count.”

26 For elaboration of the idea that “absolute spirit cannot even be conceived without world history,” see Angelica Nuzzo, “Hegel’s ‘Aesthetics’ as a Theory of Absolute Spirit,” *International Yearbook of German Idealism*, 4 (2006), 301. Art, religion, philosophy, and world history, she observes, are presented at PR §341 as “four moments belonging to the same sphere of ‘universal spirit’” (300).

as a *history*, may have ceased to matter. For the moment, however, let us consider the second possibility: that Hegel's system requires a distinctive and indispensable role for artists.²⁷ On such a view, the aerial maps of the generalist would still count as the best, and "highest," articulations of human self-understanding (highest because presuppositionless, and thus maximally free).²⁸ But art, along with religion, could be said to offer eye-level insights into local domains of human experience. After all, though Henrich's notion of redundancy projects an essentially competitive relationship between art, religion, and philosophy, the lectures point to cooperation. Art, religion, and philosophy are "three forms which work together toward achieving cognition of the True" (1820, Ms. 33).²⁹

A proper approach to Hegel's theory of the modern arts must proceed from two premises: that modern philosophy stands in just this sort of reciprocal and cooperative relationship to the modern arts, and that the arts are nonetheless subordinate to, less authoritative than, dependent in some way upon the accounts of the philosophers. How can we make sense of this dependence? Hegel puts the point by noting at the outset of the lectures that an aesthetic theory takes up the phenomenon of art "merely immediately, not as the result of a deduction [*nicht als deduziertes Resultat*]" (1823, Ms. 6). In other words, the philosophy of art cannot itself "deduce," establish the authority of, the artist's claim to offer in her work a non-discursive yet objectively valid account of some important features of human life. How is such authority established? Art is one mode of apprehending what Hegel calls Truth, and the best available accounts of this "Truth," the most

27 "The movement of absolute spirit is not a dialectical progression" Nuzzo offers, but a "cumulative process in which all the systematic layers developed so far are finally brought together." Moreover, given that "being a necessary stage in this process requires a systematic presence that cannot be canceled," the end of art thesis appears untenable ("Hegel's 'Aesthetics' as a Theory of Absolute Spirit," 306, 296). I am not exactly sure how "progression" and "process" differ here, but the distinction seems to resemble that which I have in mind between historical and spiritual sublation.

28 Hegel is aware that this own account of philosophical forms of freedom may license views like Henrich's: "it might be held that there are other and even better means of achieving what art aims at." Nonetheless, "art seems to proceed from a higher impulse and to satisfy higher needs – at times the highest and absolute needs" (LFA 30, XIII:50). As many commentators have observed, the fact that art no longer satisfies the highest human needs, as it did in fifth-century Athens, does not mean it has ceased to serve the higher needs of self-reflection in general.

29 Or again, Hotho's edition asserts the "reciprocal necessity" of the three forms, which are said to "complement one another" (LFA 95, XIII:132).

versatile accounts of human possibilities in general, come from philosophers. (The satisfaction of our “interests,” he says, simply “demands abstraction” [1826b, Ms. 3a].) As is well known, Hegel thinks that art which expresses or presupposes an inadequate understanding of human life cannot succeed as art. What sort of understanding does he have in mind?

It is true that Hegel engages, as do most of us, in some ethical criticism of the arts.³⁰ But the sense in which philosophical accounts constrain artistic practice does not suggest a sort of Soviet criticism in which particular norms are applied to particular works. What is at issue is instead something like a basic picture, an account of the relationship between mind and world, the way we take things to be and the way they “are,” that all artistic and religious efforts at self-understanding must either arrive at or simply presuppose. Hegel’s term for his own version of this basic picture is “the Idea,” one on which, simplifying greatly, the apparent dualities of mind and world, norm and nature, appear to us as having been systematically overcome, thereby satisfying our “interest,” the highest we can have, in the basic comprehensibility and coherence of our lives in the world. (To see and feel this assurance, to encounter it in our actual social institutions, is what it means for us to feel “at home” or “reconciled” or, simply, “free.”) Hegel builds this basic but deeply contentious philosophical picture into his theory of art itself: art simply *is* the presentation of the Idea, its “sensuous shining [*sinnliche Scheinen*]” in the phrase made famous by Hotho’s edition (LFA 111, XIII:151).³¹ When Hegel says that the ultimate aim (*Endzweck*) of art is “to unveil the *truth* in the form of sensuous artistic configuration,” he means that works of art succeed when they can be understood as confronting the “oppositions” that “have always pre-occupied and troubled the human consciousness”³² and presenting them to us as “reconciled [*versöhnt*]” (LFA 54, 55, XIII:80, 82).

30 For a defense of this view, see Noël Carroll, “Moderate Moralism” in *Beyond Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

31 There is of course more terminology here for those who want it. The Idea is the Concept made real. The Concept is reconciliation discursively grasped – a general account of how problems must be conceived if they are to admit of resolution. The prescriptions of the Concept must in turn be made actual in a form of life. Where this is achieved, where the world ultimately is as it must ultimately be, the Idea is manifest. The Idea as embodied in a particular shape and presented to the senses is the *Ideal*.

32 These include “the battle of spirit against flesh,” the “harsh opposition between inner freedom and the necessity of external nature,” the conflict “between theory or subjective thinking, and objective existence and experience.” Such oppositions are not

It should be clear that the relationship between truth and beauty is asymmetric: knowing which art is not art depends logically upon knowing which basic picture of human life (dualist or non-dualist) is ultimately tenable; but knowing which picture is the right one does not depend, it now appears in retrospect, upon knowing which art is good. This is the sense in which I understand the claim that “It is religion which is necessary for art” while “religion, on the other hand, does not need this external [i.e. aesthetic] presentation” (1820, Ms. 34). The point holds, transitively, for philosophy. It emerges, of course, only in history. In the classical age, the best and deepest accounts of human life just are those offered by poets and sculptors – Homer and Hesiod “gave the Greeks their gods” (LFA 444, XIV:34). The distinction between beauty and truth that becomes thematized in romantic art remains invisible here in such a way that the sort of ethical criticism essential to making sense of Hamlet, Macbeth, and Lear is here almost difficult to imagine. After all, Hegel seems to think, to act with virtue just is, for an ancient Greek, to pursue the sorts of heroic self-sufficiency projected in Homeric epic (LFA 184–5, XIII:242–3). It is only with the rise to prominence of religious and then philosophical accounts of the right and the true that the epistemic constraint on artistic value comes to the fore, that it becomes first possible and then necessary to ask oneself what can count as art in the first place.

Not everything, in Hegel’s view. Readers of the *Aesthetics* familiar with contemporary analytic philosophy of art cannot help but note Hegel’s basic indifference toward the project of “defining” art or the artwork in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions.³³ And yet Hegel is more interested than has been appreciated in the boundaries of the concept, in the possibility that something looking very much like art (Dutch genre painting, Jean Paul’s novels) and treated as such by the artworld (collected by Sulpiz Boisserée or reviewed in the proper periodicals) might in fact *not be art at all*. Consider the two examples just mentioned. Struck by the genre paintings and still lifes of the

the result of having the wrong theory, by the way: they have not been “invented ... by the subtlety of reflection or the pedantry of philosophy” (LFA 53–4, XIII:80). For this reason, artworks will succeed when they manage to present a human situation or predicament in such a way that we sense both the seriousness of the problem and the fact of its resolution.

33 Pippin calls it a theory of “great art” (“Absence of Aesthetics,” 395n5). This is less true, of course, for Hegel’s accounts of his contemporaries (Hippel, Kotzebue, Rückert, Schadow).

Dutch masters in Boisserée's collection, works so vigorously slight they seem to be about nothing at all, Hegel observes that "the difficulty arises of saying *what art is*" (1826b, Ms. 55; cf. LFA 596, XIV:223; my emphasis). On further reflection, it will turn out, such paintings must be seen as genuine works of art, but the same cannot be said for Jean Paul's novels: "Herewith art actually ends; humorous works are in fact no longer works of art" (1826b, Ms. 56). The insight that it is of the nature of modern art to prompt in its audience the question not only of the work's meaning but of its very possibility as art is one of Hegel's most powerful and distinctive. Less successful has been his view that a philosophical account of art can with some authority draw (or draw out) the boundaries of the concept of art such that it becomes possible to exclude, to position as a kind of non-art, as with the novels of Jean Paul, the work of a given movement or school. To be more precise: what is radical in Hegel is not the idea of a distinction between art and non-art. It is the notion that this distinction can be drawn on the basis not of social practices, as in Dickie's institutional theory, or the purity of the artist's intentions, as in Collingwood, but the basic metaphysical commitments implicit in the work itself. A survey of cases in which Hegel does and does not draw this sort of distinction will help us distinguish roughly between what I will call bad art, pre-art, non-art, and anti-art. The possibility of the latter two categories will offer the clearest illustration of art's subordination to philosophy.

Consider the sort of artistic failure that recurs most frequently in Hegel's discussion of modern art. Forced to take as his subject a form of life that has grown too complicated, specialized, and bureaucratic for its animating forces to admit of embodiment in a pantheon of gods, or in the tales of heroes, the modern artist's efforts to reflect his culture back to itself in some form of epic fail to achieve the characteristic vitality, the breadth of scope and truth of detail, of Homer. So, for example, Klopstock's efforts to revive a national mythology from the *Nibelungenlied* end in kitsch.³⁴ Or, Goethe's novels fall curiously flat. The freedom which Wilhelm Meister can aspire to and does achieve, for instance, is ultimately not an *individual* freedom – he muddles along till settling down – but a freedom belonging to the *world* in which he lives, a world that can generously permit such muddling precisely because it

34 "[T]hose dead gods remained wholly and completely false and null, and there was a sort of silly hypocrisy in pretending to act as if reason and the national faith were supposed to take them seriously" (LFA 1155).

fears no challenge from it. Hector's freedom is his own, but Meister's is distributed among the novel's social structures in ways that, failing to come sharply into view, make for loose embodiment and indifferent art.³⁵ *Elective Affinities*, meanwhile, seems to compensate for its failure to grasp the whole by littering its pages with the sort of disembodied detail – “a collection of individual traits which do not arise from the subject matter,” for example “the parks, the *tableaux vivants*, and the swingings of the pendulum, the feel of metals, the headaches” (LFA 297, XIII:384) – that had already puzzled Hegel in Dutch genre painting. The point here is that while these works may fail in certain ways, may count despite their author's genius as bad or unsuccessful art, they do not fail to count as artworks in the first place. They are trying, if not succeeding, to present as reconciled the oppositions of modern life.³⁶

A different sense of failure emerges from the literature, or literatures, of the sublime. The sublime is a form of symbolic art, which Hegel refers to in general as a sort of “*Vorkunst* [pre-art, incipient art]” (LFA 303, XIII:393; cf. 314, XIII:408). Symbolic art does not so much fail to embody the Idea as it does to attempt such an embodiment in the first place. In the less interesting case (Egyptian and Indian art), the attempt is not made because the notion of a reconciled opposition is simply not yet available. (In the theriocephaly of their gods, for instance, the Egyptians have imagined the union of spirit and nature rather too literally.) The Hebrew sublime is a different and more interesting case, for we find expressed in the psalms and scriptures of the ancient Israelites not only the gulf dividing God from man, or Thoth's head from his shoulders, but the principled impossibility of its closure. The “purest expression of the sublime,” Hegel writes in a striking passage, is the fact that “God is the creator of the universe” – the creator, that is, and not the *procreator*. The begettings which open the Greek and Babylonian cosmogonies are something humans can understand, but the very idea of a creation *ex nihilo*, the “pur[ity]” and “bodiless[ness]” of the *fiat lux*, is incomprehensible (LFA 373, XIII:481). Like Egyptian

35 For a more detailed account, see [chapter 5](#).

36 In one sense, of course, *all* post-classical art fails to fully embody a reconciled opposition, and thus fails as (beautiful) art. But Hegel refers to romantic art as “the self-transcendence of art ... within its own sphere and in the form of art itself” (LFA 80). As I argue later, I take this “transcendence” to suggest a strategy by which romantic artists, acknowledging their failures (lack of beauty, triviality of subject matter) and developing new forms of compensation (e.g. vivifying displays of wit and skill), leave behind the classical Ideal.

statuary, Hebrew poetry does not even attempt the embodiment of the Idea, but this failure is no longer the “unconscious symbolism” of the Egyptians: it is an open refusal, the deliberateness of which has its most vivid image in the ban on images themselves. Israelite art is important because it anticipates, as pre-art, that other great refusal in the history of literature: Romantic irony.

The Romantic refusal to realize the Idea – to *make art* at all – is sharpened by its position in history. While the Hebrew Bible was imagined and written, Hegel assumes, in ignorance of the Greek achievement – this is the narrower sense of *Vorkunst* – the poets of the *Athenäum* are writing in the wake of centuries of great art, amid an unprecedented consolidation of social and intellectual freedoms, and down the street from the birth of speculative philosophy. Again, Hegel is not in the business of analysis or definition: symbolic art is “*gleichsam*” *Vorkunst*, and the notions of non-art and anti-art I have suggested have no corollaries in the texts. The point, however, is that Hegel is clearly open to the view that some postclassical art is not art at all. We have seen him consider this verdict in the case of Dutch painting and deliver it in the case of the humorous novel. Jean Paul’s work is not a revival of the sublime, for it does not actively resist reconciliation. Rather, in sacrificing all else to its own giddy displays of wit, humor simply loses sight of, ceases to pursue, the embodiment of reconciliation. If Jean Paul creates mere non-art, the Jena Romantics pursue a variety that might be called anti-art. At one point, for instance, Hegel refers to Irony as “*das Allerunkünstlerischste*.” Knox’s rendering of this phrase (“the most inartistic”) is not inaccurate, but it misses the sense in which Romanticism not only lacks but openly opposes what Hegel then calls the “true principle of the artwork,” namely, the presentation of the Idea (LFA 68, XIII:98). Irony is in fact “the most *anti-artistic*.”³⁷ When

37 A possible objection: if Hegel believes that an art of “reconciled opposition” will always succeed while that of “rupture and estrangement” will always fail, doesn’t he fall back on just the sort of inflexible treatment of content and form for which I criticized Henrich above? The answer is that “the Idea” expressed in a work is not the same as its “meaning [*Bedeutung*]” or “content [*Inhalt*].” The Idea is instead a way of approaching that content (conceiving it as a reconciled opposition) and embodying it in a form (as completely as possible). The content of a work is the opposition it treats – e.g. “the rage of Achilles” in the case of the *Iliad*. Of course it is possible to say that a successful artwork is in some sense “about” its own achievement of reconciliation, and thus that all successful artworks are about the same thing, but this is never the full story. A successful work is about reconciliation only by presenting a particular opposition in a particular way.

Hegel calls Friedrich Schlegel's "poetry of poetry" the "flattest prose", we can take him to be discriminating between bad art and non-art, for that is precisely what "prose" is: non-literary print. What particularly interests Hegel is the role of the ineffable here, the fact that "what is unsaid" in Schlegel's poetry and poetics "is given out as the best thing of all" (LFA 296, XIII:383). At a glance, the criticism seems traditional: Schlegel has failed to embody content in form, has told but not shown.³⁸ But the complaint is really that Schlegel has tried to make a virtue not of his failure but of his refusal to play the game of making art. In doing so, he has assumed the role of Yahweh, whose incomprehensibility, as in Schlegel's essay on "Unverständlichkeit," is precisely the source of his authority, is "given out as the best thing of all."³⁹ Art is not subordinate to philosophy, on this view; it is insubordinate.⁴⁰

My point in bringing out the distinctions implicit in the lectures between bad art, pre-art, non-art and what I have called anti-art has been to sharpen our sense of modern art's subordination to philosophy. By distinguishing two quite different ways in which a modern artwork can be said to fail, we can distinguish two different roles for the speculative aesthete to play. On the one hand, the philosopher of art emerges as a sort of advisor, sketching for artists and audiences a view of those genres that appear ill-suited to modern life (e.g. epic, sculpture) and those that offer promise (e.g. the lyric). On the other hand, and this is the radical gesture, the philosopher can move

38 Hegel's emphasis on such embodiment, together with his acute awareness of modernity's tendency toward abstraction (whether of *Verstand* or *Vernunft*), makes him the theorist of art best suited to capture the "show-don't-tell" maxim (inevitably, itself an abstraction) familiar to teachers of writing. Here is Nabokov on Chekhov's "The Lady with the Little Dog": "The author has hinted already that Gurov was witty in the company of women, and instead of having the reader take it for granted (you know the old method of describing the talk as 'brilliant' but giving no samples of the conversation), Chekhov makes him joke in a really attractive, winning way" (*Lectures on Russian Literature* [New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2002], 257).

39 Schlegel's shortcomings were not only metaphysical, of course. He also lacked "natural talent" (1823, Ms. 20). By the same token, there must have been Romantics who possessed it – Novalis, perhaps, whose mention in the lectures is sympathetic (LFA 159), and perhaps Hölderlin as well. In other words, just as there can be better and worse art, there can be better and worse non-art.

40 Whether calling for the coupling of art and philosophy in the *Universalpoesie* of *Athenaeum Fragment* 116 (henceforth, AF), or celebrating sexual and gender trespass in *Lucinde*, Schlegel rejects one by one the foundational distinctions of modern life Hegel was seeking to clarify and authorize. This rejection is expressed not with the sense of conflictedness and tragedy evident in Novalis (and Hölderlin), but with a willful and, to Hegel, vexing insouciance.

to exclude, or to position as a kind of anti-art, the work that springs from the bad infinity, the “perverse tendency” (LFA 64, XIII:93), of Romantic metaphysics. The former practice of criticism is infected by a historical sociology; the latter is, in the broad sense, ethical.

In the end, the infamy of Hegel’s end of art thesis comes down to two claims. The first is that art no longer serves our highest aims, which is of course radical not for the suggestion that art now fails to do so but for the suggestion that it ever did. The lover of art is not conceding much if she acknowledges that poets are not always in the best position to enlighten us on our deepest values. (Political philosophers will do a better job of elucidating for us the sources of our commitments to representative democracy or progressive taxation). Nor is she conceding much if she denies the autonomy of art, allowing that a work’s success can be constrained in certain ways by other (discursive) accounts of what is good or true. (Again, few of us reject outright the possibility of ethical criticism.) The second radical claim, that art is subordinate to philosophy, i.e. asymmetrically dependent upon a resolution of the problem of dualism in its most abstract, metaphysical form, is radical indeed, and difficult for us to swallow. Whether it struck Hegel himself as a radical proposal is an interesting question. Is it peculiar to have thought that almost all of the world’s great art prior to 1800 had sought coherence rather than fragmentation, “religion” (PM §554) rather than irony? He certainly makes a case for attributing to the great works of Homer, Sophocles, Aristophanes, Phidias, Raphael, Michelangelo, Shakespeare, Rembrandt, Goethe, and Schiller a sense that the highest matters of human concern are not in principle unknowable or incapable of redress. The difficulty we have with Hegel’s suggestion that Romanticism is not art is of course that so much great painting, music, and literature has succeeded since 1800 precisely by denying that they are, by reprising the Romantic sense of the ineffable.

Hegel does not help his case here by collapsing the various tendencies within German Romanticism into a single bloc. He tends to assume, for instance, that the *Sehnsucht* of a Novalis is essentially equivalent to the *Ironie* of a Schlegel. This is because he takes himself to have shown in the final movements of Chapter 6 of the *Phenomenology* that Novalis’s position is internally unstable. The beautiful soul either wastes away, retreating from life and ceasing to count as an ethical possibility, or, having seen the gulf between its own high-mindedness and its utter ineffectuality, begins to laugh first at itself and then at

everything – since that is what the self had been. There is something compelling about this account, for the beautiful soul is indeed caught in a one-sided and essentially untenable position. But the beautiful soul is also something of an abstraction. One can accept a broadly Hegelian stance in metaphysics and ethics and still find oneself dissatisfied with certain aspects of late capitalism or political liberalism; one can find oneself beset by the sense that we are strangers to each other and to ourselves and homeless in our world; one can, in short, cleave to the rejection of philosophical dualisms, enjoy a life richly rooted in family and the state, and still indulge in a bit of longing from time to time. Do all Romanticisms end in Irony? Does a taste for Kafka end with Duchamp?

The uncharacteristically long discussion Hegel devotes to Schiller's poem "Die Götter Griechenlands" suggests the intense concern with which he regarded modern art's expression of nostalgia.⁴¹ In its first version, the poem had expressed a powerful "longing [*Sehnsucht*]" (LFA 507, XIV:114) for the Greek past and a sharp critique of Christian culture. But when Schiller revised the poem a dozen years later, he added a stanza that seemed to Hegel to acknowledge and recant the atavism of the early draft. "Was unsterblich im Gesang soll leben," reads the crucial couplet, "Muss im Leben untergehn." What shall live undyingly in song (i.e. the gods of Greece) must pass away in life. "With these words," Hegel concludes, "there is ratified what we have just mentioned" – namely, that the Greek picture of the world, comprising an image of subjectivity so unreflective that it can find adequate expression in a marble statue, cannot "give final satisfaction to the finite spirit" (LFA 508, XIV:115). Hegel's account of the poem's beauty and of the evident relief with which he greeted its revision recalls another famous comment on the place of *Sehnsucht* in modern life. "If one were permitted a longing," he says in his opening remarks on the Greek philosophers, "it would be for such lands, for such circumstances."⁴² There is a remarkable poignancy to this line, in which Hegel comes close to longing, as it were, for the permission to long. Again, it is the denial of such permission by the speculative philosopher that strikes us today as particularly rigorist. To return to the question at hand,

41 This is not the only passage in which he pauses to note the nostalgia of Schiller's verse. See his quotation from "Männichfaltigkeit" ("Alle zählen nur für Einen, traurig beherrscht sie der Begriff") at 1826b, Ms. 3–3a.

42 "Wenn es erlaubt wäre, eine Sehnsucht zu haben, so nach solchem Lande, solchem Zustande" (XVIII:173), cited in Henrich, "Contemporary Relevance," 207.

however, none of what I have been saying about art's subordination lends any support to the pessimistic position advanced by Henrich. Modern art may be circumscribed, but it is by no means redundant or effete. Despite their strictures, Hegel's polemics against the literature of irony and the poetry of longing have the curious effect of suggesting their relevance and vitality. If art were really exhausted, after all, why would Hegel worry about Tieck and Kleist?⁴³

Hegel's pessimism

Whether or not Henrich and Danto's arguments succeed, no reader of the lectures can remain insensitive to their air of loss or to the skepticism with which Hegel greets the art of his own day. Never again can a "golden age" be achieved of the sort witnessed at Athens or Florence (1823, Ms. 191; LFA 10, XIII:24). Klopstock's nationalism is kitsch, the Berlin Art Exhibition of 1828 has proved a disappointment (LFA 856–7, xv:91–2), music is increasingly for experts alone (LFA 936, xv:195), and even the "infinitely rich field" of character study opened up by Shakespeare stands, in the work of Iffland and Kotzebue, "readily in danger of declining into emptiness and banality" (LFA 586, XIV:211). It is worth noting that Hegel was not the only contemporary observer to feel this way. August Schlegel had argued in 1802 that "the arts are, all in all, in steep decline," and that "we must honor past eras as unreachable."⁴⁴ "We must simply not make exaggerated demands on the people of our times," his brother agreed; "what has grown in such a sickly environment naturally cannot be anything else but sickly."⁴⁵ Still, Hegel's pronouncements on the end of art seem to harden these laments into a kind of principle. Supporters may contend that he "never actually makes such a claim";⁴⁶ and it is true that

43 Kleist's irrationalist fascination with the supernatural and his interest in characters who, like the Prince of Homburg, are fundamentally at odds with themselves strike Hegel, not incorrectly, as voicing doubts about the possibility of reflective freedom (LFA 578–9).

44 *Vorlesungen über schöne Literatur und Kunst*, 3 vols. (Stuttgart: Göschen, 1884), II, 43–4 (my translation). Henceforth, *Vorlesungen*. These lectures, delivered in Berlin in 1801–3, are not to be confused with the better-known *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur*, delivered in Vienna in 1808.

45 Friedrich Schlegel, "Letter on the Novel" in J.M. Bernstein, ed., *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 289.

46 Houlgate, "Hegel and the 'End' of Art," 1; cf. Magnus, "Spirit's Symbolic Self-Presentation in Art," 201.

we must be careful not to infer the death of art from the claim that it “has its end [*Ende*]” in the comedies of Aristophanes (1823, Ms. 311; cf. 1820, Ms. 331). (“*Ende*” refers here, in its logical sense, to the endpoint of a course of conceptual development.) But there is no use in denying his references to Jean Paul’s humor or modern German drama as “the actual cessation [*Aufhören*] of art” (1820, Ms. 329), as the stage of history in which “art is hereby completed [*vollendet*]” (1823, Ms. 189).

We will see below that Hegel’s pessimism, sharpest in the first half of the decade, is softened in the final lecture series. But it is also worth considering the context of these lectures. Given the threats Hegel felt from competing accounts of the position of the arts in modernity, it is quite possible that his starkest references to the cessation and completion of art’s significance betray a rhetorical intent. By his own account, Hegel’s greatest debts in the field of aesthetics are those owed to Kant, whose decision to ground the experience of beauty in a theory of judgment, rather than sensation, offered a powerful challenge to the empiricist aesthetic tradition of the eighteenth century (LFA 56, 60, XIII:83, 88).⁴⁷ But Hegel was not the only modern German laying claim to the Kantian legacy. Schelling had famously elevated artistic creativity to the peak of the *System* published at the height of his Jena celebrity, and if Fichte himself never developed much in the way of an aesthetic theory, it was clear that the efforts of Novalis and Schlegel, emerging from the conversations they referred to as “*Fichtesieren*,” owed much to him. By the end of the century, then, it was clear that the two principal alternatives to emerge from the Kantian project, Fichte’s and Schelling’s, had each led to the view that the reconciliation of subject and object was to be accomplished in the work of art, not the work of thought. How vital were these alternatives to Hegel’s view? In his editor’s preface to the *Aesthetics*, Hotho voices the hope that their publication will establish Hegel, beyond Schelling and K.F. Solger, as the foremost aesthetic theorist of the day.⁴⁸ It is perhaps unlikely that Hegel viewed these men as rivals. His lectures on art were popular, well attended (unlike Schopenhauer’s), and staged at the very center of European modernity.⁴⁹ Solger had died in 1819; Friedrich Schlegel

47 Kant’s was “the first ever rational word on beauty,” *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* III, 526.

48 Noted by Gethmann-Siefert, “Einleitung (1823),” xxxiv. I will refer to her introduction to the Kehler manuscript as “Einleitung (1826).”

49 On Berlin as a focal point of modern life, see Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

wielded political influence from Vienna but no longer played an active role in philosophical debates; and if Schelling continued to publish, he figures in the lectures more as a precursor than a live adversary. (His “distorted” view of art is not important enough to merit serious discussion [LFA 63, XIII:91].⁵⁰) And yet despite the lack of an exponent of his stature, it was clear to Hegel that the neo-Fichtean and Schellingian positions continued to win adherents among the younger generation. Hegel had come face to face with the persistence of the Romantic line in the person, and then the oeuvre, an extensive review of which he published in 1828, of his Berlin colleague Karl Solger.

Hegel evidently liked Solger and comments with donnish approval on the “genuinely speculative inmost need” motivating his work (LFA 68, XIII:98).⁵¹ In the review essay, he works to show that Solger maintained a degree of critical distance from Schlegel.⁵² Still, Solger’s treatment of art, religion, and philosophy as “identical” forms of reflection suggests an ironist’s indifference to disciplinary boundaries vexing to Hegel. Had Solger accepted his views on the subordination of the arts, Hegel might have found much to sympathize with in the suggestion that art “coaxes our eyes down from that which is higher and draws it for the first time into the interior of things.”⁵³ (We will see him say things very much in this spirit.) But what Hegel cannot bring himself to forgive is Solger’s basic dissatisfaction with modernity: the plaintiveness of his tone and the appeal to a Romantic aesthetic in which that plaintiveness finds expression. “I should like thought to be entirely absorbed again in life,” Hegel finds Solger musing. “People don’t want to live, but to chat about life. If only someone who in our own day had sought to achieve something truly vital – someone like Novalis or Kleist – could make it through [*durchkommen*]!”⁵⁴ Hegel’s reply, mixing condescension and disappointment, is worth citing.

50 Though diminished in academic stature, Schelling continued for some years to act as Secretary of Munich’s *Akademie der bildenden Künste* and may have wielded some influence over the contemporary artworld.

51 It is not unlikely that Solger reminded Hegel somewhat of his own younger self. Apart from the speculative knack he demonstrated and his youthful interest in the creation of an aesthetic culture, the young Solger had aspired, like Hegel, to the “Popularität” of the Lessingian *Volkserzieher* (XI:266). One often has the sense in reading the “Review of Solger” that Hegel, who pays special attention to these confessional passages, is peering into his own past. On the notion of the *Volkserzieher*, see Pinkard’s *Hegel*, 14–16.

52 He does the same in a long discursive footnote appended to the Remark to PR §140 (pp. 180–1).

53 XI:266; translations mine. 54 XI:267.

Solger, as noted above, failed to recognize the characteristic vitality [*Lebendigkeit*] contained in the nature of the thinking Idea, a vitality already deeply and profoundly grasped by Aristotle as of the highest kind. This ancient says (Metaphysics xi, 7): "The activity of thought is life [*Leben*]" ... But if it comes to a discussion of the artistic consciousness of the "truly vital" and a contemporary German artist should be named as an example, and rather than Goethe (who really did offer the "truly vital [*recht Lebendige*]" and who really did manage to "make it through") it is *Novalis* or *Kleist* who is named – then one sees that it is only a thoroughly reflective thinking, or rather a self-alienated and self-disrupted life, which is here in question. (xi:267)

Solger was in Hegel's opinion among the best philosophers of art at work in modern Germany, a dialectical thinker and the author of valuable commentaries on classical texts. In holding out for art to offer "true vitality" to the modern world, however, he had pinned his hopes on the revival of a golden age, one in which the poets – Shelley's "legislators"⁵⁵ or the young Hegel's "new mytholog[ists]" – would once again give the culture its gods.⁵⁶ (Nietzsche would revive this hope, remarking with admiration in his essay on history that "The culture of the Renaissance" was "raised on the shoulders of ... a band of a hundred men."⁵⁷) The worry here is not merely that Solger is spending his hopes on an unlikelihood but that he is failing to come to grips with the vitality already on hand in the institutions of modern bourgeois life. Perhaps the example of a talented young thinker compelled by such visions, one whose work had been influential enough to merit a posthumous review a decade on, led Hegel to feel that the possibility and desirability of such a golden age needed to be put to rest decisively. Schelling had argued for this desirability independent of the actual state of modern art: "We must ... be allowed to hope for a Sophocles of the differentiated age."⁵⁸ But for Hegel such hopes, like

55 In his "Defence of Poetry" Shelley argues that poets "are not only the authors of language and of music, of the dance, and architecture, and statuary, and painting: they are the institutors of laws, and the founders of civil society." They "were called, in the earlier epochs of the world, legislators" because they "behol[d] intensely the present as it is, and discove[r] those laws according to which present things ought to be ordered" (*Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. D.H. Reiman and N. Fraistat [New York: W.W. Norton, 2002], 512–3).

56 For Hegel's hopes for a new mythology, see the document referred to as "The Oldest System Program of German Idealism" (I:234–6).

57 *The Use and Abuse of History*, trans. Adrian Collins (New York: Macmillan, 1957), 14.

58 Schelling, *Philosophy of Art* [1802–3], trans. D.W. Stott (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 273.

all forms of *Sehnsucht*, were precisely not “allowed.”⁵⁹ And yet how is Hegel to make his case in the lectures on art themselves? For the real argument against the desirability of a differentiated Sophocles, an artistic satisfaction of highest needs, is that such satisfaction belongs only to philosophy, and this is an argument that belongs not to the *Aesthetics* but to the *Encyclopedia*. If Hegel’s work in theoretical philosophy has failed to convince Solger’s generation, the chief recourse available to the lectures on aesthetics is *empirical*. They must survey the contemporary scene and find it wanting, and it is not difficult to imagine that in doing so Hegel may have been led at times to overstate his case, to point to the dramas of Kotzebue and Iffland as the “actual end” of art rather than as symptoms of certain modern pathologies.

We can reckon the extent of Hegel’s pessimism by considering the pressures felt – or, worse, felt no longer – by the artists of the nineteenth century. In doing so, it will be useful to consider Hegel’s account of creativity, or “genius,” and to contrast this with the influential account set forth in the Third Critique. The distinctive feature of the latter is its emphasis on originality: unconstrained by academic prescriptions, or even by an explicit grasp of what she is after, the genius is free to break the old rules and invent a new one.⁶⁰ Commentators have noted Hegel’s relative lack of interest in a theory of genius, especially as compared with Kant or Schelling.⁶¹ He avoids the subject in part because he was aware of the great appeal this view of genius held for the Romantic generation – the Fichtean strain in Schlegel is the just radicalization of the originality of the *Ich* – and he was eager to dismiss its significance.⁶² Put another way, however, a theory of creativity depends upon some conception of the value of that which is created, and Hegel’s critique of genius is in a deeper sense required by his view of the aims of art. Works are meaningful, in his view, because they communicate, and since this communication is transacted in the dense mediums of sense and feeling – since the work’s meaning must “shine through” its form – the chief task of a theory of creativity is to explain how this translucence, this unusual adequacy of content to

⁵⁹ See note 42, above.

⁶⁰ Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. W.S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), §49, Ak. v:317. Henceforth, CJ.

⁶¹ Nuzzo, for example, who cites Düring (“Hegel’s ‘Aesthetics’ as Theory of Absolute Spirit,” 295).

⁶² Actually, he stipulates it out of existence: “originality,” he declares, “is identical with true objectivity” (LFA 294; cf. 298).

form, becomes possible. For Kant, meanwhile, an artwork succeeds not by expressing an attitude or point of view but by spurring a certain sort of cognitive activity. On that view, the task of a theory of creativity is to explain how the artist hits upon the ratio of clarity to obscurity, of pattern to chaos, that can spark a free play in the everyday activities of the mind. We can make out already from this sketch the sorts of artistic capacity that Hegel and Kant will tend to privilege. If the artist's task is essentially to stimulate, to absorb and involve, the talent she requires will involve something much more like sophistication, nuance, the capacity to surprise: genius as originality. If the artist's task is to make raw objects express our deepest concerns, to make something like marble into something like freedom, then she will need a sort of preternatural sense of fit.⁶³ Hegel's term for this ability is *Phantasie*, and it forms the center of his own account of genius.⁶⁴

For Kant, "nature gives the rule to art" by way of "talent (natural disposition)."⁶⁵ Hegel agrees that artistic ability is to an extent simply given,⁶⁶ as he agrees that that givenness is itself insufficient for artistic success. Where they differ is in the estimation of this naturalness. In Kant's view, what is needed is a check to raw creativity. This is the faculty of "taste" which, in "clip[ping] the wings" of genius, draws the artist back from "original nonsense."⁶⁷ Hegel goes further than Kant in qualifying the naturalness of genius: the "*first* requirement of an artist" is that he "must live and become at home in" his world, that he "must have seen much, heard much, and retained much," and "it is silly to believe that the genuine artist does not know what he is doing" in his creative activity (LFA 281–2, 283, XIII:364–5) (a view that if not held by Kant himself is nonetheless one toward which his position tends). Note the difference in orientation here: whereas the

63 Cf. LFA 283–6, esp. 286.

64 For more on *Phantasie*, see the section on wit and imagination in chapter 3.

65 CJ §46, Ak. v:307. Unlike Plato's account of enthusiasm in the *Ion*, a view to which it bears a superficial resemblance, there is no real suggestion of divine inspiration here. Kant's point is simply that the sources of creativity are to a significant degree opaque to consciousness (for which reason aesthetic theories that busy themselves with enumerating principles of composition are bankrupt in his view).

66 "[T]he artist in his production is at the same time a creature of nature," he says, "and his skill is a *natural* talent" (LFA 604; cf. LFA 283–4). Schelling rated genius extremely highly in the 1800 System; through it "a contradiction is resolved" – that of mind and nature – "which is soluble absolutely and otherwise by nothing else" (*System of Transcendental Idealism* [1800], trans. Peter Heath [Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1997], 228).

67 CJ §50, Ak. v:319; §46, Ak. v:307.

acquisition of taste plays a merely negative role in Kant's account, it is the artist's *Bildung* that, for Hegel, allows him a legitimate claim on our attention. On a formalist account like Kant's, so to speak, it is nature that makes an artist and training that makes a better one.⁶⁸ On a cognitivist account, it is the other way around: depth is the first requirement, while genius, or *Phantasie*, that preternatural sense for fit, allows an artwork to succeed, its depth to "shine through." One index of Hegel's effort to depreciate the claims of naturalness which, in a theory of genius, he must nevertheless allow is his otherwise peculiar observation that artists, particularly poets, tend to get better as they get older (1823, Ms. 9–10; LFA 283, XIII:366).⁶⁹

But the chief difference between Hegel's cognitivist and Kant's formalist account of creativity is that the latter is essentially ahistorical. It is true that patterns of taste, the ratio of complexity to clarity, may shift in this or that direction across time, and it may thus be difficult for the artworld of one era to take complete pleasure in the works of another. But since the possibility of art depends for Kant on the communication of, if anything, a state of mind and not a view of the world, changes in the basic constitution of that world, of what Hegel calls the *Weltzustand*, have only an incidental effect. For Hegel, by contrast, the artist is "tied down by the substance of his material, a substance imminent in himself, to the specific mode of its exhibition" (LFA 603, XIV:232).⁷⁰ As cultures grow more reflective, of course, iconographies

68 Attempts to clear Kant of the charge of formalism succeed only where formalism is understood crudely to mean something like the view that content is entirely irrelevant, or that artforms rich in conceptual content, such as poetry, cannot be explained. (See, for instance, P. Guyer, "Kant's Conception of Fine Art," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 52, 3 [1994], 275–85; and H. Allison, *Kant's Theory of Taste* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002].) The point of calling Kant a formalist remains untouched here. In his view, a poet aims not to communicate an attitude or point of view on matters of shared concern, but to draw upon such matters in order to animate the mind. "[T]he understanding employs this material [i.e. rational ideas such as virtue and death] not so much objectively, for cognition, as subjectively, namely, to quicken the cognitive powers, though indirectly this serves cognition too" (CJ §49, Ak. v:317).

69 Music, which involves the communication of entirely non-discursive and thus highly undifferentiated attitudes and points of view – "the contentless, thoughtless resonance of the heart" (1823, Ms. 9) – benefits least from *Bildung* and is thus the art in which talents, like Mozart's, announce themselves early.

70 As his comments on "Ossian" reveal, Hegel is so confident in the correspondence of *Weltzustand* and artistic expression that historical forgeries strike him as impossible. The very idea that the eighteenth-century scholar James Macpherson could have invented these poems is absurd: "Although famous English critics like Dr. Johnson

weaken, and the artist who has come to understand her national gods as metaphors has become "a *tabula rasa*" (LFA 605, XIV:235), one with no reason to paint Jesus rather than Zeus or Goethe's Mignon. (By contrast, Hegel observes admiringly, Fra Angelico "never painted his Redeemer's Crucifixion without bursting into tears" [LFA 879, XV:119].) The modern world, it turns out, is in fact perfectly suited to a Kantian theory of genius, for the weakening of religious ties favors the exercise of originality. But this freedom tends to overwhelm the subtler instincts of *Phantasie*, making it far more difficult for the artist to achieve that degree of fit which "make[s] his chosen mode of presentation necessary" (LFA 604, XIV:233), and the loss of this necessity opens the way to the range of pathologies Hegel catalogues: an overemphasis on content (Schiller's noble but prosaic verse) or form (Jean Paul's humor, or the academicism of modern music) or neither (commercial portraiture).

Hegel's theory of creativity thus involves the interaction of three variables: the artist's natural sense for harmonies of content and form; his intelligence and cultivation (these grow with age); and the sort of world to which he belongs. I hope it is clear from this sketch both why Hegel is pessimistic about the modern arts and why Henrich and Danto seem wrong to consider this pessimism a matter of policy or principle rather than a matter of degree. Great achievements may be infrequent, and there will be many failures,⁷¹ but the destabilizing freedoms of the artist do not make the achievement of a meaningful fit impossible. Still, something more than bare possibility is required, and it strikes me here as particularly significant that having cooled Solger's hopes for a revival of the golden age, Hegel turns in the final pages of Part Two to suggest the sorts of talents or capacities that might be required from the artists of a differentiated age. Because the artist cannot appeal his choices to any religious authority,

and Shaw have been blind enough to pretend that these poems are a bungled work of Macpherson himself, it is nevertheless absolutely impossible for any modern poet to have created such ancient national situations and events out of his own head" (LFA 1100).

71 With the rise of an art-consuming bourgeois leisure class, moreover, more art will probably be made than ever before, a point Hegel may have in mind when he comments that just about anyone can write poetry (1823, Ms. 20) or a good letter (LFA 609). Relevant here is the problem of "dilettantism," the growth of casual artistic production among the middle classes, to which Goethe and Schiller devote a series of published "Notes" in 1799. Lyric poetry is an art particularly suited to dilettantes, they argue, insofar as "the subjective of itself is [here] of great importance" (*Goethe's Literary Essays*, ed. J.E. Spingarn [New York: Felix Ungar, 1964], 71).

his great and free soul must know and possess its own ground, must be sure of itself and confident in itself. The great artist today needs in particular the free development of the spirit ... [O]ver all determinate forms of intuition and presentation the free spirit [*freie Geist*] has made himself master in that he ... ascribes value to them only on the strength of the higher content which in the course of his recreation he puts into them as adequate to them. (LFA 606, XIV 236)

There are two things to note here. First, the unexpected optimism: Hegel clearly thinks there will be such a thing as the “great artist today.”⁷² He presents this figure’s greatness in terms neither of talent nor of cultivation, though these are mentioned, but of something more like a persona: confidence, self-sufficiency, flexibility, freedom.⁷³ We are closer here to the Kantian picture of genius, to the artist who can break the rule, but the difference is again the status of the natural. Where Kant’s genius is a sort of prodigy, Hegel’s *freie Geist* is fully, even heroically, self-inventing and self-aware. As the chapters on painting and lyric poetry will reveal, and as Goethe’s towering example seemed to make clear to Hegel, the artist *qua* individual will come to assume a much more important role in a modern (secular, untethered, market-driven) age of art. But the second point, present only in the background of this passage, is that the freedom of the “free spirit” is inevitably a mixed blessing. Hegel’s philosophy is a philosophy of freedom, after all, and it may seem that the familiar progress of history toward liberation and self-legislation is reflected here in the liberation of the artist from the strictures of religious tradition. As readers of the *Aesthetics* know, however, this is not entirely the case, and the reason is that freedom, for Hegel, cannot be merely negative. The liberation of an artist from a tradition can only count as valuable if it serves as the preparation for the achievement of some higher, more comprehensive demonstration of a positive freedom – being-at-home, reconciliation to a form of life, and so on.

One way to put the point is this. With the passing of religious art, and, after it, the sort of national project Hegel finds in the painting of

72 Pippin thinks that Hegel gives us little sense of how this great art shall be produced since “the only forms of art he allows as ‘post-romantic’ are greatly diminished in ambition and importance” (“Absence of Aesthetics,” 415). But the reference to a great artist – a Goethe – should make us wonder whether objective humor exhausts the possibilities of modern literature and whether it is itself so exhausted a possibility.

73 The antithesis here is Schlegels’ flight to the spiritual and aesthetic “stability” of Catholicism (LFA 606).

the seventeenth-century Netherlands, the artist has become an individual. But what is free in modern life is, for Hegel, not *spirits* but “spirit” itself – not modern Europeans taken one by one, but European culture itself. The very phrase Hegel uses – *freie Geist* – brings this point into relief. According to the *Encyclopedia*, “free spirit” is the final stage of what Hegel calls “subjective spirit,” his account of the sensory, emotional, psychological, cognitive, and practical capacities that together constitute a mature human agent. Subjective spirit is “free” when its cognitive capacities are realized in its practical reason, when what Hegel calls “free intelligence” joins “free will” (PM §481–2, x:300–2). The great modern artist, in other words, the Goethean free spirit, is the individual who has most fully achieved the cultivation and integration of his personality. But this figure is, despite his achievements, a sort of free-floating entity. Spirit has not yet become “objective” here, in Hegel’s terms; the individual has not yet taken his place in a polis and a culture. The freedom of the *freie Geist* is thus in one sense positive: he is fully at home in himself, capable, say, of a reflective clarity about his emotions, an acknowledgement of his neuroses and prejudices, and thus an ability to translate his ideas into works. (He is capable of writing the sort of deeply reflective autobiography, say, that Goethe produced in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*.) This work of self-cultivation will help him to cleave to his project in the absence of a tradition, and will inoculate him against some of the pathologies of modern art (academicism, self-indulgence, and so forth). But the free spirit’s freedom is in another sense negative: his self-cultivation has no clear reference yet to the world in which it must have been achieved, and the “higher content” of which Hegel speaks in the passage cited above may prove to be somewhat empty, may turn out simply to be the example of his own great coherence. Shakespearean tragedy is about people just like this, Hegel thinks, about individuals who exhibit an integrity of personality that ultimately has nothing to do with, and is thus destroyed by, the incoherent and politically savage cultures in which they live. The lives of these heroes have no ethical content: they are one-sided achievements, examples of what Hegel calls “formal firmness of character” (LFA 577, xiv:199).

In a passage to which I return below and throughout this study, Hegel speaks of the artist of daily life, of naturalistic painting and literature, as succeeding by virtue of a quality of artistic vigor and concentration he calls “subjective liveliness” (LFA 596, xiv:224). We will return to take up the latter term, liveliness or *Lebendigkeit*, in [chapter 2](#). Suffice it

to say that Hegel regards it as an essential quality of successful art, and one that is in most classical and romantic practice “objective,” that is, present in the work itself and in the culture it reflects. The notion that liveliness has become “subjective” in the modern arts recalls the one-sidedness of “subjective spirit,” and of its perfection in the *freie Geist*. The question that remains to be answered as we turn to accounts of the particular arts is how the great artist’s supreme self-cultivation can be something other than a formal achievement, can make substantive contact with its world and with the particular concerns of its audience. To summarize again: Hegel is pessimistic about the modern arts insofar as their traditionlessness opens the way to caprice and merely negative freedom; the resulting pathologies will not often be avoided or overcome; but in the case of a supremely developed individual like Goethe, they may be; the question is then whether Goethe has anything shareable and public to say to us, or whether he is left to point to and perform his own cultivation as such. This is a problem not only for modernity but for modernism itself, in which the figure of the artist as hero, the gigantic “I” of *Leaves of Grass* or the “Stephen Hero” of the *Portrait* and *Ulysses*, threatens to float away, a free intelligence and a free will, from the world in which he lives.

Building the case for indispensability

Thus far we have challenged Henrich’s pessimistic reading (it fails to explain art’s sublation and appeals to an un-Hegelian duality of content and form), framed art’s subordination to philosophy (it cannot neglect or oppose the achievement of reconciliation), and qualified Hegel’s pessimism (as perhaps rhetorical and as a matter not of principle but of degree). We can now begin to outline the positive account of art’s distinctive value that will occupy us in the chapters to come.⁷⁴ By and large, efforts to sketch such an account have not been promising. One approach has been to set art’s value aside and argue for its durability on historical grounds. On one proposal, the fact that

74 Must a “distinctive” value be understood here as either “instrumental” or “intrinsic”? No. Art’s presentation of the Idea to the senses is valuable not because it helps us *toward* free and rational agency, but because the enjoyment of art just is one *kind* of rational freedom. (Thanks to Terry Pinkard for pressing me on this point.) An activity is of distinctive value when its contribution is not obviously procurable elsewhere. Could art’s role some day be usurped by some other practice, thereby proving it to have been dispensable all along? No. Any practice that managed in the future to present the life’s oppositions to the senses as reconciled just *would be* art.

human cultures each pass through an artistic period before moving on to religious and philosophical forms of understanding suggests that episodes of artistic renewal will continue to arise as history proceeds.⁷⁵ Another suggestion is that an end to art presupposes an end to history, but since Hegel rejects the latter idea he could not have affirmed the former.⁷⁶ A second sort of approach suggests that the distinctive value of modern art resides in a sort of exemplary failure.⁷⁷ The idea that the overwhelming of the imagination constitutes a valuable aesthetic experience belongs of course to Kant, not Hegel (for whom sublime art is pre- or anti-art).⁷⁸ Bernstein, who takes up this line, acknowledges this as an effort to read Hegel “against the grain.”⁷⁹ (Even as such it is not necessarily a success.⁸⁰) Finally, a third line of argument

75 Wicks, “Hegel’s Aesthetics: An Overview,” 351–2; 368–71. Apart from the possibly tendentious claim that every culture proceeds through an aesthetic phase, and the obvious difficulty that cultural innovation is at an effective end, in Hegel’s view, with the advent of modernity, the chief problem is Wicks’s failure to explain why such revivals would even matter.

76 Ido Geiger takes the persistence of war and revolution in Europe as “decisive evidence” that Hegel did not believe “freedom [had yet been] made actual as a rational form of life” (“Is Art a Thing of the Past?”, 176–7). But Geiger does not show that Hegel considered an end of history impossible in principle. Should Europe ever settle into some stable sociopolitical configuration, we would be left with the undesirable conclusion that art had been dispensable all along. A more concrete proposal is that modern drama, and *Wallenstein* in particular, can “give life to the tragedy of the foundation of the state” (174). This is interesting, but Hegel did not think of *Wallenstein* as a bellwether for modern art. I explain in [chapter 4](#) why lyric, not drama, is the form of literary art he finds most auspicious.

77 Given the incomplete, “symbolic” quality of its appeal to sense and imagination, K.D. Magnus argues, the artwork affords the “vital experience” of “[spirit’s] own limitation” (“Spirit’s Symbolic Self-Presentation in Art,” 203). Richard Bernstein suggests that “the absolute need for art concerns not its role in aiding the mind to know itself, but its function as a form of resistance ... against the claim of self-authorizing mindedness” (“Freedom from Nature? Post-Hegelian Reflections on the End(s) of Art” in Houlgate, ed., *Hegel and the Arts*, 219).

78 A third defender of this view, Cascardi, is at least open about his inspiration: “art serves a ‘memorial’ role, that in a culture of ‘reflection’ art allows us to see what it might have been like to make universal claims on the basis of sensuous particulars, without the prior mediation of concepts. This memory is, of course, but a version of the Kantian ‘as if’” (*Consequences of Enlightenment*, 125).

79 “Freedom from Nature? Post-Hegelian Reflections on the End(s) of Art,” 218. Cascardi and Bernstein both cite Adorno as their inspiration, for whom modern art remains as a “memory of what has been vanquished” (*Aesthetic Theory*, 366, cited at Cascardi, *Consequences of Enlightenment*, 126).

80 If spirit’s limitation is what is sought, the history of art, the record of its golden age, might be thought to suffice. Does spirit require new art, new failures, to remind it of its limitation? Magnus’s proposal seems in this sense to revert back to Danto’s claim about art dissolving in the study of its own history.

departs from the idea that art furnishes experiences of particularity. This is taken by some as a matter of content (the cultural particularity emphasized by Gethmann-Siefert),⁸¹ by others as a matter of form (the sensuous particularity emphasized by Houlgate).⁸² The latter of these proposals is certainly close to the spirit of Hegel's thought in general, but as it stands the notion of a need for sensuous representation is too ahistorical to ground a Hegelian account of the modern arts. (I will argue in [chapter 3](#) that it succeeds most obviously as an account of the value of artistic virtuosity.)

To suggest an orientation to the problem that I will take up in the rest of this book, and to buttress the indispensability reading, consider the following two passages, both of which have gone largely unnoticed. At one point in his discussion of the lyric, Hegel makes the familiar observation that in modernity philosophical thought "outsoars the imagination of the heart and vision because it can bring its content into free self-consciousness in a more decisively universal way." Then comes a striking qualification:

Yet this form, conversely, is burdened [*gehaftet*] with the abstraction of developing solely in the province of thinking ... so that man in the concrete may find himself forced to express [*aussprechen*] the contents and results of his philosophical mind in a concrete way as penetrated by his heart and vision, his imagination and feeling, in order in this way to have and provide a total expression [*Ausdruck*] of his whole inner life. (LFA 1128, xv:437)⁸³

The same note is struck in the general remarks on literature. Again, Hegel is in the middle of a familiar observation, this time on the way

81 On Kai Hammermeister's view, art captures the "individual manifestations" of the truth that "cannot be subsumed under the concept," "above all" the "mores [*Sittlichkeit*]" that differ from society to society" (*The German Aesthetic Tradition* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002], 104). This view resembles Gethmann-Siefert's, which I will discuss in [chapter 5](#).

82 Stephen Houlgate notes that "We are still irreducibly sensuous beings for Hegel, and will always need to see the truth in a sensuous or imaginative, as well as a reflective, form" ("Hegel and the 'End' of Art," 15). Commentators sometimes reiterate this line without explaining the permanence of this "need": for instance, Etter ("Hegel's Aesthetic and the Possibility of Art Criticism," 40).

83 Cf. "Thinking is only a reconciliation between reality and truth within thinking itself. But poetic creation and formation is a reconciliation in the form of a *real* phenomenon itself." Poetry "has to represent reason individualized," must "take speculative thinking into the imagination and give it a body, as it were, within the spirit itself" (LFA 976, 977, xv:244, 245).

that language, originally a poetic form of expression, is flattened in modernity into the stereotypes of prose. But rather than conceding the damage to literary art, Hegel now proposes that a certain kind of poetry can “work its way out of the abstraction of the ordinary way of putting things [*aus der gewohnten Abstraktion des Vorstellens*] and into a concrete liveliness [*Lebendigkeit*].” Where this effort succeeds,

not only is poetry liberated from that separation between thinking, which is concentrated on the universal, and feeling and vision, which seize on the individual, but it also at the same time frees these latter forms of consciousness [feeling and vision] and their content and objects from their servitude to thinking and conducts them victoriously to reconciliation with the universality of thought. (LFA 1006, xv:282)

Opponents of the pessimistic reading often point to the passage in which Hegel expresses a hope “that art will always rise higher and come to perfection” (LFA 103, XIII:142). But absent a sense of the need for or the value of such perfection, it can hardly be said to matter. The passage just cited, however, offers both a historical framework and a decisive, if broadly phrased, rationale for art’s enduring value. If there is no reason to infer from Hegel’s pessimism a principled objection to the modern arts; if it is possible for art to stand in a relationship to philosophy that is subservient, because epistemically dependent, and yet vital, because affording distinctive possibilities of freedom; and if Hegel directs his audience, in fact, toward the significance, even the indispensability, of these possibilities, then the groundwork for the remainder of this study has been established. The question toward which we can now begin to turn is that of modern painting and modern literature’s distinctive values.

Looking back to the cited passages, we can distinguish a few alternatives. First, works of art might be valuable because they allow for a kind of Schillerian integration of the personality by way of the expression and thus the acknowledgement of the lower faculties of sensation and imagination. The second passage, with its talk of repressions and liberations, the “servitude” of feeling to thought and its “free[ing]” in poetry, suggests this sort of approach. By opening up and exercising these faculties in the experience of works of art, we could see ourselves as acknowledging and enjoying our own embodiment – or something

like that.⁸⁴ But this expressivist picture remains “formal,” as Hegel might say, and incomplete. If the lower faculties are to be freed from servitude, this cannot simply be in virtue of the fact that they are “ours” and that to deny their expression would be in some abstract sense unwholesome or repressive. After all, there are many human capacities – those of dreaming or leaping, say – about whose liberation from “servitude” Hegel has very little to say. Feeling and vision must deserve their freedom, as it were, in virtue of the contributions they can make to self-understanding. To suggest that art matters because it shows us the value of the faculties it engages is only to beg the question of that value itself. The real work would then involve an account of just how the servitude of these faculties impairs our self-understanding, fails to fully develop its content. This is the risk suggested in the first passage, where Hegel speaks not of the actualization of faculties but the need for a “total expression [*Ausdruck, aussprechen*]” of a particular content: that of the “inner life.”⁸⁵

This content-based approach to the question of modern art’s value can itself be pursued in two ways, one modest and one robust. On the strongest interpretation of the above passages, one might argue that philosophical accounts remain burdened and undeveloped even when it comes to the subjects most native to philosophy. In other words, the articulation of a basic picture of mind and world – involving accounts of the incoherence of skepticism, the epistemic crudeness of positivism, the reflective instability of all forms of dualism – would require elaboration and embodiment in works of art. This possibility is now being explored.⁸⁶ It is not, however, the one I will pursue. My own approach has been to construe Hegel’s reference to “the whole inner life [*ganzen Inneren*]” more narrowly, and to suggest that its fuller expression is of particular concern in those departments of life in which the abstraction and inadequacy of a philosophical account

84 On this reading, Hegel would be extending Kant’s account of aesthetic pleasure as involving an implicit awareness of the determinability of the faculties of sensation by those of the understanding and thus as “symbolizing,” or suggesting by analogy, the determinability of the faculty of desire by the faculty of reason, i.e. the possibility of morality (CJ §59, Ak. v:353).

85 Unlike the English verb “to express”, which can have as its object either a content or a capacity – “I expressed my feelings” vs. “I expressed my creativity” – the German verb *aussprechen* refers only to the former.

86 In Robert Pippin’s recent work, which presents artworks as constitutive, for Hegel, of our grasp of basic philosophical and ethical norms rather than as mere “examples” of the same. See note 127, below.

is most acutely felt. As I will argue in the chapters to come, it is to the disappointments of daily life – work, love, the existence of the poor – that the most important modern artworks turn their attention. It remains perfectly possible on this view that a proper grasp of basic norms, whether ethical or metaphysical, will turn out to require cooperation from the arts as well. But when we look to the lectures themselves, I would suggest, we see that particular concern with “the inner life,” the realm of subjectivity, personality, and felt experience, registered in the passage cited above.

It was in this realm, after all, that disappointment and *Sehnsucht* had taken root in Solger and his generation. Hegel the philosopher sought to cauterize these disappointments by flatly rejecting the possibility and desirability of a new golden age and by flirting with the idea of an end to art. But in the contemporary works he valued most, chiefly those of lyric poetry, we can see that Hegel is interested in art as a way of repairing rather than rejecting those disappointments, of engaging with and finding vitality in those realms of life most likely to seem dead – the contingencies of the market, the contingencies of love, the impossibility of heroism, the banality of daily tasks. Again, it is these subjects that seem least suited to the abstractions of philosophy and therefore only loosely integrated into the picture of modern life as reconciled and free. It is perhaps an instructive coincidence here that Hegel’s own prohibition against nostalgia for a classical past – “If one were permitted a longing,” but one is not – offers us an example of the very sort of abstraction and aridity with which philosophical accounts of the inner life are burdened. There is a difference between denying the possibility of a golden age and wholly resisting its appeal. It may be sufficient to point to the *Encyclopedia* or the *Phenomenology* and declare that art can never again play the role it did for Homer’s Greece. But it will not do to point to these works and say that the wish for such a possibility is incoherent, or decadent, or sickly. The overcoming of Schelling’s philosophical account of art may be a matter for philosophers. But the overcoming of Novalis’s heartache is a matter for poets.

Does Hegel change his mind?

The first two-thirds of “The End of the Romantic Form of Art,” the concluding section of Hegel’s philosophy of art history, are devoted to familiar doubts about the threats to creativity introduced by the loss

of shared religious content and the contingencies of the art market.⁸⁷ In the final subsection, however, Hegel rather abruptly shifts tack and offers a consideration of “the content and the forms which can be considered characteristic” of the post-romantic art of his own day (LFA 606, XIV:237). It is on this passage, and its corresponding antecedents in the lecture transcripts, that any broad account of Hegel’s theory of the modern arts must take its stand. Before engaging the details, such as they are, of the rather sketchy argument, however, we must address a philological concern alluded to above. Henrich claims that the apparent *volte-face* of the final pages is the result of textual corruption.

As is now increasingly well known, scholars have begun in recent decades to question the integrity of the posthumously published *Lectures on Fine Art*. The edition known to us is based on transcripts of the lecture series of 1823, 1826, and 1828 (not 1820) and edited, conceivably in partisan fashion, by Hegel’s pupil H.G. Hotho. According to Annemarie Gethmann-Siebert, the leading scholar and archivist of these manuscripts, broad skepticism about the published edition is warranted. “Given the status of the sources it is hardly possible to reconstruct Hegel’s aesthetics unambiguously,” she maintains. “The four Berlin lecture series ... differ so fundamentally from one another that it is no longer possible to speak of ‘the aesthetics’ of Hegel.”⁸⁸ Henrich agrees, at least in the present case. Hotho’s version “camouflages” Hegel’s “original thesis” (the end of art) in his view by arbitrarily privileging the vague, lax account of the contemporary scene that Hegel offers in the final lecture series.⁸⁹ The 1828

87 Hegel observes that in the case of architects, sculptors, and painters, the subject of the work tends to “come to the artist from the outside,” principally in the form of commissions (LFA 606). This seems wrong: painters and sculptors relied much less on commissions in the nineteenth century than they did in the fifteenth. But one could save Hegel’s point by noting that the contingent prerogatives of the art market, its fads and busts, suggest this “externality” no less than that of a commission.

88 “Einleitung (1823),” LXXXVIII.

89 Henrich, “Contemporary Relevance” (200). Gethmann-Siebert also speaks of Hotho’s “camouflage of the thesis of the end of art” (“Einleitung [1823],” xci), and elsewhere of his “softening” of it (“Einleitung [1823],” xxv, note). She has mounted a sustained critique of Hotho’s editing, suggesting that it distorts Hegel’s arguments, at times severely, but scholars have tended to find the case for distortion less persuasive (e.g. Bubner, *Innovations of Idealism*, 217n1). The lecture transcripts themselves, whose clipped arguments are as telegraphic in places as anything in Aristotle, are hardly authoritative, and I have tended to view the elaborations of Hotho’s text as valuable and suggestive commentaries on the ideas in play. Where possible, I have tried to check ideas drawn from his edition against the lecture transcripts themselves.

account is anomalous, Henrich alleges, insofar as the preceding versions “maintain in a literal sense the necessity of the decay of art and of its end.”⁹⁰ If accurate, the force of Henrich’s charge would not be, I believe, to persuade us that the 1828 account is in some way illegitimate and thus fit to be ignored, but rather to encourage the opinion that Hegel had simply not made up his mind on the question of art’s end and that any talk either of defending or of rebutting the famous *Satz* is likely to prove tendentious. Fortunately, however, Henrich’s charge is unconvincing: a survey of the available lecture transcripts offers strong evidence of the coherence and integrity of Hegel’s views. Henrich is correct to mark a difference in the lectures of 1828/29. As I hope to show, however, this difference amounts to an elaboration, not an alteration, of earlier formulations. More precisely, it sketches a solution to the problem they were left with. I begin by rehearsing the 1828 account as it is presented in Hotho’s edition – i.e. Hegel’s identification of “the content and the forms characteristic” of modern art; I then consider its anticipation in the Berlin lectures of 1820 and 1823.⁹¹

Art requires for its success a substantive and shareable content and the possibility of forms adequate thereto. The content is the decisive factor.⁹² Once this is established, the question turns to the available forms. (Thus the Christian emphasis on interiority forces a shift from sculpture to painting, not vice versa.) Hegel’s aim in the 1828 lectures, as recorded here by Hotho, is to establish the possibility of a vital modern art by identifying content and form. We should expect the burden of the argument for modern art to fall on the identification of an appropriate content, from which suitable forms will necessarily follow. What is striking about modern art, it turns out, is that this is not the case. For the identification of a content for modern art, what Hegel will call “*Humanus*,” does not solve the problem. It is this curious state of affairs, in my view, that shapes the development of Hegel’s positions on the question over the course of the 1820s.

90 “Art and Philosophy of Art Today: Reflections with Reference to Hegel” (translation of “Kunst und Kunst Philosophie der Gegenwart”) in Richard E. Amacher and Victor Lange, eds., *New Perspectives in German Literary Criticism: A Collection of Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 114n.

91 Because I have seen only portions of the 1828 Liebelt manuscript (Ms. 37a–38a, 42–42a, 96a–103a, 127–136a, and 149a–151) I cannot say with certainty how sharply the final lecture series departs from the first three.

92 “[I]t is the content which, as in all human work, so also in art is decisive” (LFA 611; cf. 517).

Under the premodern dispensation, artistic content is thrown up spontaneously (*fertig*) from a shared stock of myth and legend. The question “What is the source of our norms?” is answered by the sculptor, whose work argues, “*This* is Zeus,” as the question “What is human excellence?” is answered by the poet, who argues “*This* is Achilles.” As the number of gods falls to one and accounts of norms ramify into complexity, pictures and stories serve increasingly only as illustrations and eventually not at all.⁹³ Hegel has his own account of where these developments lead: not wishing to be fired by the culture, he suggests, artists may be tempted simply to quit. Thus, in the “subjective humor” of Jean Paul, the artworld takes possession of its own redundancy by flouting the very premise of its value, namely the shareability or objectivity of its content. But such an impasse has its dialectical egress. While the modern artist “acquires his content in himself” (LFA 607, XIV:238), he may yet struggle to recover something shareable from the rummage of his experience. It is in making this attempt that the modern artworld “makes *Humanus* its new saint.”⁹⁴ The name echoes the famous line from Terence – *nil humani a me alienum puto* – that Hegel cites in the Introduction (LFA 46, XIII:70).⁹⁵ More immediately, however, *Humanus* is an allegorical figure central to an unfinished and little-known epic poem of Goethe’s, “The Mysteries” [“Die Geheimnisse”]. If these allusions are oblique, the point remains clear enough. Art is modern when it grasps the fact that regardless of national and religious affiliations its subject has always been the nature of human life, the predicament and the possibility of rational agency. The content of such an art is neither a pantheon nor a holy family but simply “the appearance and activity of imperishable humanity,” “the depths and heights of the human heart as such, mankind in its ... strivings, deeds and fates” (LFA 607–8, XIV:238–9).⁹⁶

93 Once reflection has set in, and “the essential worldviews implicit in the concept of art ... are in every respect revealed in art,” then “art has got rid of this content which on every occasion was determinate for a particular people” (LFA 604).

94 For “*Heilige*” I prefer “saint” here to Knox’s “holy of holies.” For further discussion, see Donougho, “Remarks on ‘*Humanus Heißt der Heilige*,’” *Hegel-Studien*, 17 (1982).

95 *Humani* is here the partitive genitive of the adjective *humanus*. In the original, the phrase reads *Homo sum: alienum nihil a me alienum puto*.

96 According to Goethe, dilettante poetry as well (see note 71, above) exhibits a “more manifold interest ‘in humanioribus’” (*Goethe’s Literary Essays*, 76).

Why do these interests rally under the obscure aegis of Goethe's half-written ode? The answer has to do with Hegel's freethinking humanism. In the poem, a young traveling monk spends the night at a Rosicrucian monastery led by a man named Humanus. The term "mysteries," according to Nicholas Boyle, referred in the eighteenth century both to the doctrines of the Freemasons and to the doctrines of the various historical religions that the Freemasons claimed to have supplanted.⁹⁷ (Boyle also suggests that the reason Goethe left the poem unfinished was that, while writing *Wilhelm Meister*, he had satisfactorily presented the idea of the masonic order in the Abbé's "Society of the Tower."⁹⁸) There is something grandiose about this new "saint" with his Latin name, and Donougho is right to suggest that Hegel uses it "ironically rather than with Feuerbachian fervor."⁹⁹ In one sense, it is the heterodoxy of Goethe's take on modern sainthood that catches Hegel's attention in the first place.¹⁰⁰ But if the irony in question here is meant to imply that the heart and its universality are for Hegel a fiction, Donougho's reading is certainly too strong.¹⁰¹ For Hegel as for Goethe, the fact that artists, like believers, have freed themselves from religious institutions does not mean that they have abandoned them as such. Hegel distinguishes, after all, between "religion in the stricter sense of the word" and "the life of religion [in general]" (LFA 101, 100, XIII:139), that is, the etymological sense of *religio* as that which binds together.¹⁰² In this latter sense, the choice of Humanus as the standard-bearer of the

97 *Goethe: The Poet and the Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), I, 397–8.

98 *Goethe: The Poet and the Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), II, 377.

99 "Art and History," 205.

100 The divinity of Humanus has nothing to do with divine origins or miraculous powers. For Goethe he is simply, in the testimony of a fellow monk, "the best man I ever saw [*Der beste Mann, den ich mit Augen sah*]."

101 I am not certain how to take Donougho's suggestion that Humanus is presented as "parody, the reality being the humanism immanent in such enactment" ("Art and History," 208n21). Does this mean that we can sense something like humanism in the gesture, even if qualified by irony? Or does it mean that the humanism of the gesture consists precisely in the parodying of religious forms? The former view seems the only plausible one.

102 This in turn recalls Hegel's suggestion that the "supreme sphere" of absolute spirit itself may be called "*religion ... in general*" (PM §554). Commentators who read Hegel as a religious thinker will have difficulty making sense of the *Aesthetics*. Errol Harris, for example, claims to discover a basic confusion in Hegel's view: "Now if we are to accept Hegel's definition, that beauty is the sensible appearance of the Idea (i.e., of God), it could be applied with any degree of confidence only to religious art. Yet not all art is religious, and, for me at least, insuperable difficulties arise in trying

new age makes straightforward sense. Donougho suggests that the playful invocation of religious language is intended here as a parody of the “cult” of Romanticism.¹⁰³ But the simpler reading is of course that Hegel is revising his account of modern art: what had lost its compass when it lost its mooring in religion in the first sense (LFA 603, XIV:232–3) has now recaptured it, tentatively and with a wink, in the second, secular sense of religion. The “reservoir of human situations and feelings” that Humanus represents “can now constitute,” Hegel concludes, “the absolute content [*Gehalt*] of our art” (LFA 608, XIV:239).¹⁰⁴

The fragility of modern art is already implicit here, however, for it becomes very difficult to say how this content might be embodied. (Zeus can be sculpted and Jesus painted, but how should Humanus look?) Hegel’s account of the forms of modern literature, of what he calls “a sort of *objective* humor” (LFA 609, XIV:240), is accordingly hesitant. The form of modern art is not “absolute,” as is its content; on the contrary, Hegel calls objective humor a “transitional form.”¹⁰⁵ Having outlined the 1828 account of the prospects for a revitalized modern art, we can now turn to the three earlier lecture series and ask whether

to apply Hegel’s definition to other types and forms of art” (“Some Difficulties with Hegel’s Aesthetics,” *Idealistic Studies*, 28, 33 [(1998), 138]).

103 “Art and History,” 208n21.

104 Emphasis mine. In *Democracy in America*, published less than a decade after Hegel’s death, Tocqueville expresses the very same idea. The following passage might have been written by Hegel: “Amongst a democratic people poetry will not be fed with legendary lays or the memorials of old traditions. The poet will not attempt to people the universe with supernatural beings in whom his readers and his own fancy have ceased to believe; nor will he present virtues and vices in the mask of frigid personification, which are better received under their own features. All these resources fail him; but Man remains, and the poet needs no more. The destinies of mankind – man himself, taken aloof from his age and his country, and standing in the presence of Nature and of God, with his passions, his doubts, his rare prosperities, and inconceivable wretchedness – will become the chief, if not the sole theme of poetry amongst these nations. Experience may confirm this assertion, if we consider the productions of the greatest poets who have appeared since the world has been turned to democracy. The authors of our age who have so admirably delineated the features of Faust, Childe Harold, Rene, and Jocelyn, did not seek to record the actions of an individual, but to enlarge and to throw light on some of the obscurer recesses of the human heart. Such are the poems of democracy. The principle of equality does not then destroy all the subjects of poetry: it renders them less numerous, but more vast” (Book II, Section I, Ch. 17; cited in Berger, *A Theory of Art*, 89).

105 Houlgate makes sense of this notion of the *Übergangsform* by arguing that objective humor serves as a transition to the art of Humanus (“Hegel and the ‘End’ of Art,” 21n24). I think this overlooks the distinction Hegel is trying to draw between the content and the form of post-romantic art.

it presents a development of or a departure from them.¹⁰⁶ The portion of the 1820 lectures corresponding to the passages discussed above is comparable both in its outlines and its details to that later text, though its tone is rather less pessimistic than later versions. As in Hotho, Hegel narrates here the climax of Romantic art in the “true humor” of Laurence Sterne and its subsequent debasement in “subjective humor” and romantic irony. And as in Hotho, the relativization of artistic content is said to leave artists with an “absolute material [*Stoff*].” This material, as with *Humanus*, comprises the “infinity of the human heart” (1820, Ms. 180). The chief difference in this first articulation is that Hegel does not appear overly concerned with the problem of a suitable and general *form* for modern art. The task of the modern artist is here understood as that of reanimating older materials with present-day concerns, and such reanimation is made possible by the fact that “the human breast is the eternal reflection of all truth and substantiality, regardless of the particular age in which such truth resided there” (1820, Ms. 182). Henrich’s claim, according to which the early versions of the lectures express “the necessity of the decay of art,” gets no purchase in the 1820 text.

The 1823 lectures identify the same content: “What remains of interest” following the dissolution of the romantic project “is *Humanus*, universal humanity, the human heart in its fullness and its truth” (1823, Ms. 189). What has changed is that Hegel has now come to consider his earlier suggestion regarding the form of modern art problematic. When artists are left to reanimate foreign characters and scenes as if they were dramatists, or puppeteers, the artwork can only strike us as something “foreign [*fremd*].”¹⁰⁷ And yet no other option seems available. (The realism of Kotzebue and Iffland exchanges a lifeless foreignness for a lifeless familiarity.) It is here, accordingly, that Hegel introduces the skeptical argument to which the 1828 version proposes

106 Henrich imagines this as a departure from Hegel’s “original thesis,” but since I have already argued on more general grounds that his account of this thesis is misguided, what is at issue here is instead the philological question, is Hotho wrong to have given prominence to the 1828 account in his reconstruction of Hegel’s philosophy of art history?

107 This passage corresponds to the one in Hotho’s edition in which the artist’s attitude to his subject matter is said to resemble “the dramatist’s who brings on the scene and delineates different characters who are strangers to him” (LFA 605). Speight, following Henrich, has taken a recent interest in this passage, suggesting that Hegel’s reference here to drama, the greatest of the arts, recalls the achievements of the classical era while expressing the alienation of the modern artist who is unable to

a tentative reply: namely, the view that the content of modern art, *Humanus*, is “initially [*zunächst*] unbound to any form.” This is a feature peculiar to modern art since, as noted above, Hegel has thus far been content to place direct constraints on formal choices. Since art requires a rapport between form and content, and yet disallows a reflective, conceptual approach (e.g. the formal derivation of one from the other), modern art appears to be at sea. It is this concern which then invites the train of pessimistic reflections, and Henrich is justified in pointing to this shift in tone (though, again, “the necessity of the decay of art” is nowhere in evidence).¹⁰⁸ First, Hegel’s conclusion in the 1823 lectures is familiar: “One regime, one individual,” he argues, “cannot awaken a golden age of art” (1823, Ms. 190). But the impossibility of another Athens, a world in which art reigned supreme, does not entail the impossibility of the genuine, albeit partial, achievements of a Goethe. Second, in remarking that *Humanus* is unbound to any form at first, or for the time being (*zunächst*), Hegel has left the door open to just the sort of *Übergangsform* to which he will point in 1828.¹⁰⁹

At the risk of presenting this progression too neatly, it is possible to read the 1826 course as that in which Hegel reports the discovery of the *works* that will point the way forward (the *Divans* of Hafiz and Goethe) without yet conceiving them as the touchstones of a more generally possible approach to modern literature. Hegel had already in 1820 identified something like objective humor in the lyric poetry of the “south” (Petrarch) and “east” (Hafiz) (1820, Ms. 317), but in the first two lecture series he discerns no connection to Goethe’s lyric output, which is praised instead for its exemplary Germanness. (Short lyrics like “Schäfers Klagelied” and “Der König in Thule” – the second “Wandrer’s Nachtlid” is a better-known example – are Goethe’s “most affecting”

match them (“Hegel and Aesthetics,” 389–90). A more natural reading, perhaps, is that the distance between the dramatist and his characters suggests the looseness, the lack of fit, between the content of modern art (human nature) and the infinity of shapes it can assume (this culture’s life, that culture’s, this person’s, that person’s). It is no accident that this image of artist as dramatist occurs to Hegel in 1823, in his most pessimistic account of modern art. It does not appear again.

¹⁰⁸ When Hegel says that “no Dante, Ariosto, or Shakespeare can appear in our day” (LFA 608) he means simply that their particular achievements cannot be reproduced, not that achievement of this order (Ariosto is in any case not one of his heroes) is no longer possible.

¹⁰⁹ It is worth noting that the term *Übergangsform* may be Hotho’s; it does not appear in the portions of the Liebelt manuscript I have consulted.

precisely because they refuse to mock up the past in the manner of the dramatist: "They are the most his own [*sein Eigenstes*]; we find nothing foreign in them [*kein Fremdes ist uns darin*]" [1823, Ms. 2760.] In 1826, however, it is precisely Goethe's transcendence of national character that enables (though it does not constitute) his greatest success: "With respect to poetic disposition [*Anlage*], the Easterners stand much higher than the Westerners," Hegel observes. "Goethe, who was so moved by the Orient ... achieved the highest in poems about that which he loved" (1826b, Ms. 80a), he realized in his *West-östliche Divan* "the highest that poetry can accomplish" (1826a, Ms. 376). Hegel's thought on modern art can thus be seen to undergo its own dialectic. The problem of finding an adequate form for modern art lies dormant in 1820, then flares up in 1823, yielding a pessimistic tone. Still, Hegel holds open the possibility of a future solution, betraying an inquiring and undogmatic optimism that is aroused in 1826 and requited, in 1828, with the identification of an adequate form. Given the consistency of this final version with its predecessors, Hotho is justified in including it in his edition; Henrich's suspicion of bias is unfounded. It is Hotho, it turns out, who qualifies the phrase: "so erhalten wir ... einen gleichsam *objektiven* Humors." Hegel delivers it straightforwardly: "The satisfaction in such partial objects can go further, reach deeper; it can progress, in other words, toward a state of felt intimacy and the humor can become a truly objective humor" (1828, Ms. 101a). But the simpler point here is that objective humor is not only consistent with Hegel's earlier work on art but is in a sense demanded by it. The danger of the post-romantic era is that the interest in virtuosity will simply peel itself away from the interest in "content," or shared human concerns, leading to two forms of barrenness: the colorful caprice of the humorists (Jean Paul) and the drab realism of bourgeois drama (Kotzebue). It doesn't take a speculative philosopher to see that the framing of this opposition already calls for its resolution. (If we have to call this resolution "objective humor," however, we may not be in such a hurry. I will speak, where possible, of the poetry of reconciliation.)

Post-romantic art

There is one other way in which a pessimistic reading of the *Aesthetics* might be urged. Henrich had argued that from the standpoint of the philosophical system the notion of any non-redundant work left for art to do simply makes no sense. When Hegel seems to change his

mind in 1828 – when he speaks approvingly of an “objective humor,” a literature in which lyrical reflections on daily life are leavened by imagination and wit¹¹⁰ – Henrich can charge him with a simple failure of nerve. Hegel’s praise for the poetry of Goethe and Rückert is an ad hoc accommodation of contemporary trends rather than an internally motivated development.¹¹¹ It would be best to avoid such an ungenerous reading, of course, and it may be possible for the pessimist to do so by arguing this way: whether or not artists could continue in principle to make contributions in modernity, these contributions would be so occasional and piecemeal as to fail to constitute a vital institution. One could argue, in other words, that if art itself is not at an end, its history is, and without a history art remains dispensable.

Hegel does not pose as such the question of art history’s end, but his account of the “dissolution of the romantic form of art” would seem to presuppose it. Either, that is, post-romantic art is essentially late romantic, in which case it still belongs to art’s history; or, given that the romantic art has reached its “end” (LFA 602, XIV:231), the painting and poetry of the nineteenth century belongs outside of art history itself, and lingers in the sort of “post-historical” condition Danto finds evidence of in the late twentieth century. The notion of a post-historical condition relies upon a distinction between a mere chronicle, a record of art’s instances, and a proper history, a narrative conceived in terms of successive periods governed by defining “meta-narratives,” or common projects. Thus, in the tradition of European painting since the Middle Ages, Danto finds “that there is an era of imitation followed by an era of ideology, followed by our post-historical era.”¹¹² Hegel’s notion of an art history is comparable to Danto’s in that he both distinguishes art’s empirical record from its principled history (LFA 799, xv:19–20)¹¹³ and partitions that history into periods defined by overarching projects. Hegel differs from Danto, of course, in his understanding of these projects themselves, in their relationships to philosophical and religious culture in general, and in the kind of necessity discernible, retrospectively, in the transitions between periods. As Martin Donougho has observed, these periods

110 In which “the sensitive abandonment of the heart in the object” is joined to a “*subjectively* spirited movement of the imagination” (LFA 609).

111 Henrich, “Contemporary Relevance,” 201.

112 *After the End of Art*, 47.

113 Thus Hegel can refer variously to Chinese painting, poetry, architecture, and novels without including China in his history of art.

can be understood, after the manner of the *Phenomenology*, as successive efforts to make explicit the tensions and shortcomings implicit in the preceding periods. Donougho's account will help sharpen for us the sense in which romantic art could be said to have ended and the art of Hegel's day devolved into a projectless, post-historical condition. First, a quick review of the three artforms themselves.

Beauty is for Hegel the perfect mutual adequation of content and form.¹¹⁴ The division of symbolic, classical, and romantic art is then generated by the fact that beauty can be either achieved (classical art) or not achieved (symbolic and romantic art), and that this failure can be either unconscious, the result of an inability to conceive of beauty's achievement (symbolic art), or conscious, the result of an acknowledgement that the achievement is impossible given the opacity of the medium (romantic art). (The fourth logical possibility, the unconscious achievement of beauty, exists as well: the beauty of nature.) One stage gives way to the next when its shortcomings are grasped and overcome by a succeeding culture. The project of each era, as Donougho observes, is thus in an important sense retrospective: a working-out of the potential implicit in the failures of the previous form.¹¹⁵ Thus the symbolic era yields to the classical when the Greeks see that Egyptian art, which had imagined nature's superiority to man, was, by its very capacity to imagine something, a demonstration of man's superiority. The Greek project then became that of expressing this superiority in their work, a project that itself collapses when the sophistication of the ethical imagination at work in Attic tragedy suggests to the Greeks themselves that the instruments of sense and feeling are too blunt to capture the complexity of first-person experience. Romantic art then sets about expressing this complexity, though never fully, in the sorrows of Christ, Hamlet, Werther, and so on.

And then? On Donougho's view, romantic art will itself come to an end when a form of reflection arrives that can develop the significance implicit in its failures. Romantic art had succeeded so long as it could maintain a productive tension between the interest in embodying spirit in nature and the awareness that this embodiment must remain incomplete. By the turn of the nineteenth century, however, this tension had gone slack. It had come to seem as if the two romantic

114 I discuss Hegel's account of beauty in more detail in the section on beauty and liveliness in [chapter 2](#).

115 "Art and History," 184–5.

projects, the intimation of inner depths and the mere depiction of an outer world, had ceased to be related to one another. Taken to their extremes, these two tendencies generate works of art that force us to ask ourselves what an artwork is in the first place. Such questions cannot themselves be answered in painting or in literature, and romantic art comes to an end, accordingly, with the advent of philosophical aesthetics.¹¹⁶ At this point, Donougho plausibly suggests, art's history is over: the "dialectic between form and content is all used up," leaving artists "nothing more to disclose."¹¹⁷

But it is not clear to me in this argument exactly where the emphasis lies. On Donougho's view, it seems there are two ways to say that an era is at its end: first, it has exhausted its content (thoroughly unfolding the truths implicit in the previous era); second, it has been superseded by an era in which its own failures are comprehended. In other words, is romantic art finished because it is all used up? Or is it finished because the philosophy of art has arrived? The latter argument is unappealing because it suggests what I have called above the historical rather than the spiritual model of sublation. (Once romantic art has donated its principle to spirit's development, it is finished.¹¹⁸) The former argument is unpersuasive, meanwhile, since establishing it would involve proving a negative. Have artists explored *all* of the consequences of classicism's failure? *All* of the ways in which a reflective subjectivity can imagine its relationship to an unreflective world? As I read it, then, Donougho's phenomenological argument for art's exhaustion is on one construal too strict and on another too loose. If we now agree that the philosophical comprehension of art's flaws does not itself render art obsolete (in the way that the arrival of the world spirit in India *did* render China obsolete), we are left to ask how the project of post-romantic art relates to the thousand-year-old project of romantic art in general. I will suggest that the former is best seen as continuous with the latter. What Donougho's account helps bring into focus is that making the case for continuity will require showing how the art of the early nineteenth century can be understood as taking up in some fresh way the romantic problematic, which is to say the superiority of

116 Another way to put the point: what is implicit in the romantic project is the idea that profound art is superior to beautiful art. But if what really matters is profundity, not beauty, then why make art in the first place? Philosophy is more profound.

117 "Art and History," 189.

118 For criticism of this view, see above, in the [section](#) on art and philosophy.

spirit to nature that cannot be adequately presented *in* nature, in the medium of sense and feeling. Before moving on to outline the continuity of post-romantic art, let's first consider a passage that appears to sustain Donougho's sense of post-romantic exhaustion.

"[S]pirit only occupies itself with objects so long as there is something secret, not revealed, in them," Hegel observes; and yet by the late romantic period "everything is revealed" (LFA 604, XIV:234) and art seems left with nothing to do. The passage is misleading, however, and the point much narrower than it seems, for Hegel is concerned here not with modern art as such but with the revivalist trends on the contemporary scene. "Protestants as we are today," he has just noted, we can no longer take sculptures of Apollo or paintings of the Virgin seriously (LFA 603, XIV:233). The remark is directed at the Jena avant-garde, which had called for an immediate return to the tradition of Christian painting,¹¹⁹ and at Klopstock's (later, Wagner's) nationalistic efforts at reviving Nibelheim. It is true that the central project of the arts has, for millennia, involved the figuration of mythical and cultic iconographies. Once the mysterious power of characters like Zeus and Mary has been made explicit in an artistic tradition, Hegel wishes to say, the vitality of that iconography is lost. The broader point here is that iconography as such, the very idea of gathering an artistic tradition around a pantheon of gods or saints, is no longer possible. But Hegel cannot mean to suggest that the hiddenness and mystery of icons is itself required for art's possibility. The case of Dutch painting, the Protestant, post-iconographic art par excellence, makes this clear. For can we really say that the content of Dutch genre painting – "peasants, smoking, teeth extraction" and the like (LFA 598, XIV:226) – involves "something secret," something "not revealed"? As we will see in [chapter 2](#), the challenge that faces the genre painter is not that of revealing a mystery handed to him "ready-made [*fertig*]" by the culture, but rather that of endowing daily life with vitality in such a way that it begins to seem, against expectation, to harbor something hidden and significant.

119 In the "Descriptions of Paintings in Paris and the Netherlands" that he published in 1805, Friedrich Schlegel calls for a return to both the imagery ("Christian subjects," 926) and the emotional force ("religious feeling, love, and devotion," 932) of medieval and Renaissance painting. "The beauty of early Christian art ... will give inspiration to the [contemporary] painter, guiding his steps to the pure neglected source of Christian beauty, till at length a new dawn shall break the darkness of the horizon" and painting will be reborn. Excerpted in C. Harrison, P.J. Wood, and J. Gaiger, eds., *Art in Theory: 1648–1815* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

We can begin to see post-romantic art as continuous with the romantic era if we can see it as deepening and radicalizing the possibilities of post-Reformation, post-iconographic art opened up in the Netherlands. In terms of the freedom granted to or the responsibility devolved upon the individual artist, Dutch genre painting presents an intermediate stage between the stability of religious art, in which the artist can be either a good craftsman or a poor one, and the uncertainties of the modern era, in which the artist can be either a hero or a fraud. On the one hand, Dutch culture gives little direction to its painters: scenes of smoking and street-dentistry are simply not “prepared [*fertig*]” for Teniers and Rembrandt in the way the Holy Family is prepared for Perugino and Raphael. Such scenes are certainly *available* to artists (they are the stuff of Dutch life), but they are not clearly available *for art*. (They are simply too trivial, as we will see in the next chapter; it was for this reason, recall, that Dutch genre painting raised for Hegel “the difficulty of saying what an artwork is.”) But if, for the Dutch, scenes from daily life lacked the authority that Christian icons had for Italian art, they retained nonetheless a powerful national-historical significance that made the painter’s decision to treat them less than arbitrary. Modern art, which is not only post-religious but also increasingly post-national, enjoys even less guidance than the art of the Dutch, and the choice of forms and contents is now “left to capricious invention” (LFA 607, XIV:238). The point, then, is that we should not read Hegel’s reference to the loss of mystery in modern art as suggesting its post-historical, projectless condition. Rather, the negative freedoms enjoyed by the Goethean free spirit can be seen as a radicalization of, and thus as essentially continuous with, the post-Reformation phase of romantic art.

A simpler argument for the continuity of post-romantic art is the fact that Hegel simply declares it. The paradigm of a successful post-romantic project is the literary style Hegel refers to as objective humor. Objective humor proceeds by way of “the heart’s deeper immersion in the object,” and such immersion is achieved when our satisfaction in the one-sided projects of humor and naturalism is “intensified,” and reconciled, “*according to the principle [Prinzip] of romantic art*” (LFA 609, XIV:240; my emphasis).

To properly answer Donougho’s objection, however, we have to show exactly how the poet’s immersion or “absorption [*sich vertiefen*]” in the object counts as a furthering of the romantic project – an intensification according to rather than a dissolution of its “principle” – and thus as a further retrospective elaboration of the truths implicit in the collapse of classical art. Hegel defines the basic romantic project at several

points. "The spirit ... can find its correspondent existence only in its own native spiritual world of feeling, the heart, and the inner life in general," he writes in the introduction to the chapter on romantic art. "By this elevation of the spirit *to itself* the spirit wins in itself its objectivity, which hitherto [in classical art] it had to seek in the external and sensuous character of existence ... This spiritual elevation is the fundamental principle [*Grundprinzip*] of romantic art" (LFA 518, XIV:128; cf. 1826b, Ms. 49a). An immediate consequence of the external world's inferiority to spirit is the fact that spirit cannot adequately display its own depths *in* that external world. Thus beauty, or perfect adequacy, remains for romantic art "something subordinate" (LFA 518, XIV:129). Post-classical art is thus the project of expressing in two opposing ways the superiority of the human to the natural: first, and positively, by depicting episodes of feeling and reflection in such a way that makes their depth and value palpable; second, and negatively, by suggesting that in virtue of their very depth and value the capacities for feeling and reflection cannot be fully presented in the mediums available to art. There are several different ways in which these two modes, the positive and the negative, can relate to one another, and it is the progressive waning of the former and waxing of the latter that yields the three stages of romantic art. By familiarizing ourselves with these stages and the particular projects which organize them, we will be able to see more clearly the sense in which the poetry of reconciliation intensifies and extends the romantic era. Hegel's own way of carving up romantic art – Christian piety, chivalric romance, and Shakespearean individuality – tends to underplay, however, and perhaps to obscure the intensification in question and thus the continuity of the romantic project, a continuity I have suggested that Hegel left room for in 1820 and 1823 and had come to see embodied, by 1826 or 1828, in lyric poetry.

We'll begin with Hegel's division of the subject; then I'll suggest an alternative partition that helps clarify the case for continuity. Christian art, the first phase of the romantic, is concerned with what Hegel calls "inwardness of spirit for itself." Christ's life "has a relationship to existence [*Dasein*]," for he lives and dies as a man, but in the Christian view there is really nothing of value in the external world and Christ's excellence is precisely his purity, his distance from life (1826b, Ms. 49a). (Think of the way that Byzantine painters simply gild everything except their holy subjects or Italian painters locate a Madonna and Child in a sort of abstractly architectural setting. The external world is present here, but it weighs only lightly.) In the next phase, the art of chivalry, the superiority of the inner to the outer is asserted in the

outer world itself. The transcendence of earthliness and the ascension to heaven are no longer required, for the excellence of inwardness is simply or “affirmatively” present in the individual, that is, in the virtue of the knight errant (1826b, Ms. 51a). This is a curious stage of romantic art, one that in spite of the Schlegels’ enthusiasm for all things medieval produces few great works. The reason for this is its failure to acknowledge real negativity: the knight’s virtue is presented as a simple fact. (It is not, like Christ’s, “conditioned by pain” [1826b, Ms. 51a].)¹²⁰ The knight appears to devote himself to others (the maidens he loves, the victims he aids) but his unconscious interest here is really in having his own self-declared honor recognized and affirmed by others. Consistent with this avoidance of the negative, the external world that figures in and is apparently redeemed by the knight’s presence is in fact an abstraction. There is only one real person in a romaunt, and that is the knight himself: “what is still lacking at this present stage is the filling of the inwardness with the concrete content of human relations, characters, passions, and real existence in general” (LFA 572, XIV:194). In tales of chivalry, “men do not look one another in the face” (LFA 552, XIV:170). These absent faces return with a vengeance in the third and final phase of romantic art. For the knight’s virtue to become actual, it must take its place in a form of life. But once the medieval world begins to acknowledge to itself the true nature of its sociality – the poisonous deceit of Elsinore, the bloody thrones of Scotland – the pursuit of virtue seems either hopelessly naïve, or, in Hamlet and Othello, itself bloody and deceitful. Where virtue is impossible, inwardness can only appear as fixity of purpose, the “formal firmness” of Macbeth, and romantic art offers a sort of existentialism *avant la lettre*. (In the cases of Goneril and Regan, Iago and Lady Macbeth, hell is quite literally “other people.”)

The principle of romantic art is the elevation of the inner world above the outer, and its unfolding involves the progressive acknowledgement of the stubborn intransigence (the “reality”) of the natural and the political. Christian art tarries in the external, but only as a proving ground; in this way, the story of the Passion may help us endure the world, but it can’t help us live in it, and in this sense it simply avoids the problem. Chivalric romance seems to give the world its due, meanwhile, but only because the world it imagines is a fantasy, and the collapse of such ideals

120 “[H]uman subjectivity [becomes] affirmative for itself and others, without displaying the negativity implicit in that reconciliation” (LFA 573).

leads not only to their mockery (Quixote) but to some of the most harrowing drama the world has seen (*Lear*). Hegel's division of the subject, we can now see, is best suited to the narrative of dissolution that dominates the earlier lecture courses, for the radical disjunction of Hamlet's or Quixote's inner lives from the worlds they live in prepares us for the neat uncoupling of form from content – the “*Freiwerden des Stoffes*” (1826b, Ms. 49a) – found in the late romantic attitudes of mere virtuosity and mere naturalism. But if it is true that Hegel has been searching throughout the 1820s for a reconciling third way, for what he will finally call objective humor, then this way of dividing romantic art is for our present purposes misleading. Another way to slice it, keeping in view the artwork's attitude toward otherness or externality, would be to distinguish, roughly, the beautiful, the ugly, and the banal.

Beautiful romantic art is that in which the superiority of the inner to the outer is yet visible within the outer realm itself. This is the achievement of the Italian painters, whose scenes of religious love (Madonna and Child, Pietà) achieve in their “smiling through tears,” their sense of present joy, anticipated pain, and ultimate glory, images of reconciliation so nuanced that they count among the greatest artworks ever made.¹²¹ Thanks to the flexibility of layering and glazing in oils, some of this emotional nuance can actually find adequate expression in the materiality of painting, Hegel thinks, and this is one reason that Italian painting can reprise the beautiful ideal of classical art. At the same time, the inadequacy of any painting as an account of Christ's true significance is already implicit: he can be painted only as a man, not as the pure spirit he really is. Moreover, it is only the most expressive parts of the body – the hands and mouth and eyes – that painters can make beautiful. When artists realize that the rest of the natural and human worlds implicit in the Christian story also call for representation, romantic art becomes an art of ugliness: here we have the moral evils of Shakespearean tragedy and, less remarkably, the leers and flails of the northern Renaissance.¹²² Reconciliation is intimated in these works – Macbeth's heroic resolve, Christ's implicit

121 Chivalric art would count as *failed* romantic beauty insofar as it aims to present the reconciliation of spirit and nature and yet fails to take the latter (and thus the former) seriously.

122 “This is the sphere in which especially the masters of North Germany excel when, in scenes from the Passion story, it is the crudity of the soldiers, the malignity of the mockery, the barbarity of their hatred of Christ in his suffering and death, that they reveal, with great energy in characterizing the greatest uglinesses and deformities” (LFA 884).

redemption – but only dimly. And yet with an eye toward the work of Van Dyck and Rembrandt, Sterne and Hippel, Goethe and Rückert, a third attitude seems possible. Rather than rendering a fraction of the external world adequate to reflection, or insisting upon the wholesale inadequacy of the rest, an artwork might begin by *acknowledging* its lifelessness and yet working in some way to overcome and incorporate it. (This, at any rate, is how I read an important and often cited passage from the Introduction: “The new content, [having] thus won [the superiority of romantic inwardness], is on this account not tied to sensuous presentation, as if that corresponded to it, but is freed from this immediate existence *which must be set down as negative, overcome, and reflected into this spiritual unity*. In this way romantic art is the self-transcendence of art but within its own sphere and in the form of art itself” [LFA 80, XIII:112–13; my emphasis].) The Dutch genre painters, for instance, acknowledge the negativity of immediate existence by choosing subjects too trivial for serious art; modern composers foreground the negativity of pure sound by refusing to signpost their works with text; lyric poets treat contingencies of love and mood.

Donougho suggests that the dialectic of romantic art has been exhausted. But keeping in view the repartitioning of the era suggested above, we can see that what I have called the project of banal art, the effort to acknowledge and thus to reincorporate the facts of externality, remains a live option. Such a project is not likely to run out of material: the art of Humanus aims to show us “everything in which man as such is capable of being at home” (LFA 607, XIV:238), and this everything is meant to extend as far as possible into the triviality of ordinary life. Hegel might have objected to a passage in which the readers of an ambitious and philosophically sophisticated novel follow a protagonist to the outhouse and watch as he takes up a newspaper, reads a prize-winning short story, decides he could do better himself, and uses it for toilet paper. But Hegel also might have conceded victory to Joyce.¹²³ What is “of special importance” in late romantic art, he argues, is

the artist’s subjective conception and execution of the work of art, the aspect of the individual talent which can remain faithful both to the manifestations of spirit and also to the inherently substantial life of nature, even in the extreme limits of the contingency which that life reaches, and *can make significant even what is in itself without significance*,

123 Bloom takes this trip to the outhouse in the final paragraphs of *Ulysses*, Chapter 4.

and this it does through this fidelity and through the most marvellous skill of the portrayal. Then in addition there is the subjective liveliness with which the artist with his spirit and heart entirely inhabits the existence of such topics according to their whole inner and outer shape and appearance, and presents them to our vision in this animation. In view of these aspects we may not deny the name of works of art to the creations of this sphere. (LFA 596, XIV:223-4)

The project of modern art is on this account that of expanding the habitation of human life, of discovering newer and stranger places in which we are capable of “being at home.” Does this count as an intensification of the romantic principle? That is, does it demonstrate the elevation of spontaneity over receptivity within the terrain of receptivity itself? Yes. Hegel has suggested that the modern artist finds echoes of inwardness and depth in trivial situations precisely because, in the skill and energy of his execution, *he puts them there*.

The importance of “energy” in modern art deserves a further comment here. Earlier in this chapter, considering some textual evidence for art’s indispensability, we saw Hegel figure the relationship between the higher and lower faculties as one of bondsman and slave and then suggest that poetry “frees these latter forms of consciousness ... from their servitude to thinking” (LFA 1006, xv:282). Talk of poetry as a general liberation of the heart from the bonds of thought might suggest that the mere act of making art can keep it vital, that any bit of verse will do. Considered in full, however, the passage in question offers an important indication of the sort of posture a poet and her poetry may now be forced, or permitted, to assume. Hegel’s concern here is not the general notion that the faculties of sense and feeling fail to enjoy full expression, but the more pointed observation that the mediums in which they could hope to do so – language, in particular – have themselves been taken hostage. “[W]hen the mere accuracy of the prosaic way of putting things has already become the ordinary rule,” Hegel observes, “then poetry has a more difficult position” (LFA 1006, xv:281). Just as the annexation of the image by photography will force painting into gestures of an increasingly radical anti-naturalism, the poetic and prosaic views of the world may come to “restrict and disturb and even fight one another,” Hegel goes on to say. A defense of the relevance of Hegel’s thought to an account of artistic modernism could be established on this passage alone. For it is clear to Hegel that the struggle against a world of prose is not the struggle to write poetry at all, but to write a poetry that struggles. Literary language “needs a

more deliberate energy” than it once did – by which he means, here, a more vigorously metaphorical and artificial style. It is interesting here to contrast Hegel with Wordsworth, for whom the corruption of language also forces a renovation of poetic practice but for whom the world of prose, or corrupted language, is essentially one of artifice and ornament and for whom the poet’s struggle is thus a Rousseauan recovery of spoken language, ballad form, and rural life. For Hegel, the world of prose is that of legal briefs, textbooks, and the newspapers he himself loved to read. Prose is not false or deceptive language, it is simply incomplete. It is also ubiquitous and powerful, so powerful that, set beside it, a poetry of lakes and mountains may simply go unheard.

One advantage of keeping in mind the notion of struggle, of the poet’s need to liberate the language before he can employ it, is that it helps us understand the willful artifice of a Jean Paul or a Kleist as something other than self-indulgence, and thus as symptoms not of art’s decadence but of its embattled vitality. Art may be fraught with possibilities of fraud and failure, on this view, but it is not the exhausted “endgame”¹²⁴ to which defenders of the pessimistic reading refer. The battle between poetry and prose is one “that it takes supreme genius to assuage,” Hegel observes, “as witness our contemporary poetry” (LFA 1006, xv:282). Here, as usual, Hegel manages to register his pessimism while leaving the door open to the possibility of great art, of the self-assured “free spirit” we considered above. In the chapters to come, we will encounter several of the forms in which the modern artist’s “more deliberate energy,” the bold artifice of her style, makes itself felt. In [chapter 2](#), we will consider the Dutch painters of the seventeenth century. [Chapters 3–5](#) are principally concerned with the literary arts. Hegel presents modern literature (objective humor) as the reconciliation of subjective and objective tendencies in the arts. The subjective element is the artist’s own wit and “free imagination [*freie Phantasie*]” (1828, Ms. 102); I discuss these faculties in the course of an account of virtuosity in [chapter 3](#). The objective element is the universality of “the heart [*Herz, Gemüt*],” to which I turn in an account of lyric poetry in [chapter 4](#).¹²⁵ In this chapter, I have taken Hegel’s comments on the

124 The term belongs to Donougho (“Art and History,” 189), whose reading of objective humor as “an ironic though positive attitude to the ‘dramatis personae’ on our poetic world-stage” (204) appeals to Gethmann-Siefert. For my discussion of Gethmann-Siefert’s view, see [chapter 5](#).

125 Hotho’s edition pairs “imagination” and “heart” five times in the discussion of objective humor (LFA 609–11).

vitality and subordination of the modern arts to suggest that art possesses values distinct from those of philosophy and that at least some of these consist in the attention of artworks to dimensions of modern life whose inherent contingency has left them unsuited to the more abstract treatments of philosophers, and which require a kind of animation if they are to appear to us as dimensions of life in which we can be at home. In particular, the *Encyclopedia* has relatively little to say about work or love.

This is not the only viable approach to a defense of art's indispensability, and it is one that might be criticized on at least two accounts. I take what might be called a bottom-up approach in what follows, reconstructing an account of the prospects for and values of modern art by paying a good deal of attention to Hegel's comments on particular (if paradigmatic) works of art. This method has the advantage, I hope, of fidelity to the texts, but it might also be considered myopic, plodding, or (more seriously) subject less to Hegel's principles than his whims. A more systematic treatment, for instance, might not depend so heavily on Hegel's evolving estimations of a particular work like the *West-östliche Divan*. I will ask this curious poem-cycle to bear heavy explanatory burdens in the chapters to come though it has never been considered, in Hegel's day or our own, the "masterwork" he deemed it (1826b, Ms. 80a). A second objection might be that the approach pursued here is metaphysically unsophisticated, even undialectical. The idea that artists devote themselves squarely to domestic and night life while philosophers essay the moral and metaphysical questions of the age seems a rather mechanical division of labor. It is. I do not take Hegel to be offering rules to artists, nor do I take his comments to suggest a straitened view on which certain genres necessarily fail while others necessarily succeed. (Goethe's *Hermann und Dorothea*, for instance, is an important work in several ways but it is also generically eccentric, a modern idyll.) My emphasis on particular genres (genre painting, lyric poetry) is simply the result of an effort to clarify and emphasize the main lines of Hegel's account. When Robert Pippin began publishing on the *Aesthetics*, he was initially more interested in the prospects of a broadly Hegelian approach for an understanding of modernism (e.g. abstraction in painting) than he was in an account or defense of art's indispensability.¹²⁶ Recently, however, he has begun to

126 Pippin has suggested that the "indispensable" values of modern art might be most clearly visible "from other perspectives, like rhetoric and education," a curious claim

articulate a view of art's relationship to philosophy that, if successful, would yield a stronger and perhaps more elegant defense of art's value than the piecemeal account on which the present view is based.¹²⁷

given that art's value here would appear narrowly instrumental ("What Was Abstract Art?", 20n32). For Hegel's distinction between poetry and "oratory," a literary form devoted to edification and instruction, cf. LFA 995.

- 127 The idea is that literature appears to play a constitutive role in Hegel's own philosophical texts: "[O]ne important aspect of Hegel's attempt to understand and come to terms with what a norm or ideal has come to mean, how it has come to matter as experienced by subjects who avow it ... is his appeal in his 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit*, to Sophocles, Goethe, Jacobi, and Schiller, to the literature of an age, as necessary moments of human self-knowledge about themselves and what they value. [Hegel] does not treat such literature as examples of an ideal or moral commitment or general norm, but as criterial aspects of just what it could be to espouse or avow such a value, or, more importantly in his account, for such a value to lose its grip on its adherents (something that rarely happens because of any dawning realization about the force of any better argument)." Robert Pippin, "The Paradoxes of Power in the Early Novels of J.M. Coetzee" in Anton Leist and Peter Singer, eds., *J.M. Coetzee and Ethics: Philosophical Perspectives on Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). Speight had suggested that "the sort of narrative Hegel is presenting [in the *Phenomenology*] may require its literary predecessors in an indispensable way" (*Hegel, Literature, and the Problem of Agency* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001], 17). This idea is often supported by those with a neo-Aristotelian view (Nussbaum *et al.*), and there is no reason it should not appeal to Hegel as well. Pippin cites a forthcoming essay, "The Status of Literature in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*," in which this approach promises to be developed more fully. In the meantime, one could ask a few questions. First, does it matter that art plays a less significant role in the *Encyclopedia*? Hegel makes substantial use of *Faust* in the *Philosophy of Nature* (§246Z), but the mentions of Dante's *Paradiso* (§440Z) and Rumi (§573Z) in the *Philosophy of Spirit* seem more incidental. Second, does Hegel's use of literary reference points in the *Phenomenology* really treat them *as literature*? Speight notes that Hegel was less interested in Cervantes's *Quixote* itself than in its popularity in late eighteenth-century Germany (*Hegel, Literature, and the Problem of Agency*, 29–30). More strikingly, the "tragic side of Hegel's *Faust* portrait bears no particular resemblance to Goethe's," and was instead inspired by another treatment of the *Faust* myth, F.M. Klinger's novel, *Fausts Leben, Taten, and Höllenfahrt*, or, rather, by an *anonymous review* of that novel (*Hegel, Literature, and the Problem of Agency*, 26)! Examples like this suggest that the philosophical employment of literature is so high-altitude that it reduces works of art to bits of popular culture, to symptoms rather than expressions of spirit. To develop this thought a step further: of the works that had been important in the *Phenomenology*, Jacobi's *Woldemar* receives a brief mention in the *Aesthetics* and Diderot's *Rameau* does not appear at all. Has Hegel changed his mind about them, considering them less excellent than he once had, or, instead, can works of art play crucial roles in philosophical accounts even when they are not particularly good works? And if the latter is true, do we then have a defense of art's value in general that is curiously untethered from accounts of its value in particular cases?

PAINTING LIFE

And so [the painter] goes hurrying, searching. But searching for what? Be very sure that this man, such as I have depicted him – this solitary, gifted with an active imagination, ceaselessly journeying across the great human desert – has an aim loftier than that of a mere flâneur, an aim more general, something other than the fugitive pleasure of circumstance. He is looking for that quality which you must allow me to call “modernity”; for I know of no better word to express the idea that I have in mind. He makes it his business to extract from fashion whatever element it may contain of poetry within history, to distil the eternal from the transitory.

(Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*)¹

The painting of the Dutch seventeenth century, now considered its golden age, was not well liked in Hegel’s day.² Though elements of the Romantic avant-garde did favor northern European painters, they were principally attracted, in anticipation of later primitivisms, by the crude piety of the early medieval period.³ For mainstream audiences, meanwhile, Winckelmann’s neoclassicism and the (French) Academic

¹ *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. J. Mayne (London: Phaidon, 1995), 12.

² Gethmann-Siefert refers to Hegel’s “aufwertung der seinerzeit gering geschätzten niederländischen Genre und Stillebenmalerei” (“Einleitung [1826],” XLIV). Schopenhauer, characteristically out of time, liked Dutch still lifes so long as they did not depict overly tasty-looking (i.e. will-seducing) foods (*World as Will and Representation*, vol. I, ch. 3). Goethe was the exception, praising the Dutch in an early article for the *Teutsche Merkur* (“Simple Imitation of Nature, Manner, Style” [1789] in *Goethe’s Literary Essays*, ed. J.E. Spingarn [New York: Felix Ungar, 1964], 59–60) and again in *Kunst und Alterthum*, where he cited their neglect or abuse at the hands of Tieck and Wackenroder, Schlegel, and Schelling (“Ancient and Modern” [1818] in *Goethe’s Literary Essays*, 70).

³ “[O]ne must not, like the Schlegel brothers and the *Altdeuschthümmler*, esteem a picture the older and less well painted it is” (1820, Ms. 208).

hierarchy to which it was allied continued to hold sway. Schelling, who found the painters of the Netherlands “uncouth,” typifies this stance.⁴ One might have expected Hegel, an admirer of Winckelmann and a former colleague of Schelling’s, to follow the contemporary high road past the lowlands, and it is telling that he did not. Hegel’s interest in the genre, landscape, and still life painting that came in the seventeenth century to eclipse the dominance of history and religious painting has various origins. His visits to the Netherlands and to various private German collections afforded him an unusual degree of familiarity with this body of work. His studies of Goethe’s color theory and Diderot’s essay on painting sparked an interest in the technical achievements in illusionistic representation that had been made in Florence, Venice, and Flanders. Finally, he was drawn to the appearance of an antinomy in his contemporaries’ discussions of the visual arts. According to neo-classical dogma, representation is always and essentially a process of idealization, the perfection of a type. According to the naturalistic position defended by K.F. von Rumohr, representation departs from and returns to the mimesis of the existing world. It was left to the speculative philosopher to resolve this debate by reconstructing its rationality: by showing, in other words, why modern art must pay reality its due without lapsing, so to speak, into the sincerest form of flattery. It is Dutch art, in Hegel’s view, that manages this tension most productively.⁵

The effort to recuperate the value of Dutch painting takes shape against a certain worry. Hegel’s account of the modern arts, of their successes and failures, may seem to a contemporary audience the consequence of a cultural triumphalism deserving little sympathy and perhaps much scorn. The achievement of Goethe’s late verse is its pervasive “cheerfulness.” Likewise, Dutch genre painting mounts to the achievement of “coziness” and “comfort” (1826a, Ms. 285). We might reasonably wonder whether an art of coziness, a tradition that leads eventually to Norman Rockwell, can be a great one. And if

4 Schelling, *Philosophy of Art* [1802–3], trans. D.W. Stott (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 129, cited in S. Houlgate, “Hegel and the Art of Painting” in William Maker, ed., *Hegel and Aesthetics* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000), 69. See also: “Some Dutch painters have even sunk so low as to paint chicken yards” (*Philosophy of Art*, 144).

5 Summary treatments of Dutch art are available (e.g. Houlgate) but with the exception of Gethmann-Siefert’s work there has been no thorough account of its significance for Hegel’s theory of modernity. Gethmann-Siefert has helped to foreground the interest in everydayness that links Hegel’s account of genre painting to that of Goethe’s *Divan*. I respond to her work below.

Hegel answers yes, we may suspect his judgment has been obscured by speculative conclusions according to which modernity *just is* the achievement of satisfaction, from which an art of coziness follows “logically.” Supplement this worry with biographical asides on Hegel’s “Biedermeier” conservatism, as does Henrich, and whatever vigor the lectures still possess may readily go slack.

But this sketch is only partly faithful. No commentator on the *Aesthetics*, no attempt to resuscitate a Hegelian philosophy of art, can ignore the governing (focusing, limiting) impulse lent to the work by Hegel’s conviction that certain problems of self-understanding and self-organization have lately been resolved. It is true that Hegel is thus predisposed to seek out in the arts indices of modern spiritual health and that, as we saw in the previous chapter, he is perhaps too ready to disallow the yearnings, whether atavistic or utopian, of Romanticism. But he succeeds in my view in identifying certain worries about life in the modern world that post-Reformation painting is well positioned to address. It is this insight into common problems – in particular, the failures of individual self-sufficiency in a differentiated society – that keeps the discussion from amounting, as it may appear, to the mere application of a speculative premise.

The structure of painting

One way into the tension at the heart of painting between the classical demand for idealization and the romantic demand for fidelity to life (and for the technical skill to bring this off) is the notion of “semblance,” or *Schein*. Hegel employs this term, however, to characterize the predicaments both of painting and of art in general, and the two must be distinguished. In Hegel’s *Logic*, semblance appears, in its first moment, as the antonym of essence (*Wesen*), that is, as a deception counterposed to truth. But the logic of essence, the “reflective” thinking characteristic of both Christian thought and its Enlightenment rebuff, is in Hegel’s view intrinsically unstable. What is essential is contrasted to what is apparent (and potentially deceptive). But essence, so the argument goes, must “appear” – must become a possible object of experience. And to this extent, *Schein*, now reconstructed as *Erscheinung*, proves itself essential to the knowledge of essence. The dialectic of essence and semblance in the *Logic* does not relate directly to pictorial illusion but serves instead to characterize the common assumptions of both rationalism and empiricism (namely, that the

choice between appearances and things-in-themselves is one we cannot avoid making). When Hegel introduces this concern about *Schein* in the opening pages of the *Aesthetics*, it is in reply to a broad objection to the arts in general.

"[W]e designate art's manner of presentation," Hegel states, "as semblance [*Schein*]" (1826a, Ms. 44; see 1823, Ms. 2–3). Seen in one way, this seems to diminish the artwork's claims. (How can illusions yield truths?) But Hegel is departing from the Aristotelian view, one he adopts with qualifications, that art has its origins in imitation. Since mimesis is representation, artworks are caught up in the problematic relationship of the representation to the object represented. This problem arises, however, any time a claim to truth is made. The problem with *Schein*, then, is not the notion of illusion *per se*, but the fact that the illusion has been conjured, or created – that art is essentially fictional. From the standpoint of a strict rationalism (Plato's) or empiricism (the logical positivists'), fiction counts as "deception [*Täuschung*]" (1823, Ms. 1–2) and thus art cannot tell truths, or perhaps even have meaning. The reply here is that an account which limits itself to reports drawn from the immediate observation of the world amounts to its own form of deception.⁶ Semblance, or fiction, can free us from this constraint and intimate a larger truth. Such intimations involve the mediation not of concepts, but of sense and feeling. This *aesthetic* quality is captured in the second sense of the term *Scheinen* – that is, "shining."⁷ Works of art thus outstrip works of history insofar as the semblances they present permit the translucent expression of a superior standpoint.⁸ At the same time, of course, this diffuseness explains why art remains "inferior to the form of thought" (1823, Ms. 3). *Schein's* two senses thus position the arts between the empirical standpoint of the natural sciences and philosophy's speculative stance.

6 Hegel is developing an argument found in the twenty-sixth of Schiller's *Letters*: "To the question 'How far can *Schein* legitimately exist in the moral world?' the answer is then, briefly and simply, this: *to the extent that it is aesthetic Schein*; that is to say, *Schein* that neither seeks to represent reality nor needs to be represented by it. Aesthetic semblance can never be a threat to the truth of morals; and where it might seem to be otherwise, it can be shown without difficulty that the semblance was not aesthetic" (Friedrich Schiller, *Essays*, ed. W. Hinderer and D.O. Dahlstrom [New York: Continuum, 1993], 169).

7 Here is a typical formulation: "In [the realm of] beauty, being is posited as *Schein*, for the content penetrates – shines – through that which is external" (1820, Ms. 26).

8 Hegel follows Aristotle here, who argues that "poetry is both more philosophical and more serious than history, since poetry speaks more of universals, history of particulars" (*Poetics*, IX).

Though it is characteristic of the arts in general, the concept of “shining semblance” comes most clearly to the fore in the chapter on painting – the art of illusion proper.⁹ Here again the discussion is structured by its central ambiguity, though Hegel has a different point in view. Whereas *Schein* had previously illustrated the epistemic intermediacy of the work of art, the concern now is with two distinct sources of painterly value. The first of these concerns the expression of feeling. Painting is the art of expressing subjective interiority in the objective world – i.e. of allowing “subjectivity ... [to] *shine*” from within the “contingent materials” of everyday life (1820, Ms. 186). But there is a competing interest, Hegel argues, in the “magic of *Scheinen*” itself. What he has in mind here is the simple fact that modulations in tone and hue can give rise to convincing illusions – that they can “allow objects to appear as they do in nature [*als natürlich erscheinen*]” (1820, Ms. 195). The tension between shining and seeming thus prepares the ground for the tension within painting itself. A picture may succeed either as a deep expression of feeling or as brilliant show of skill, and “this separation of judgments,” as Hotho has it, “is implicit in the very nature of painting itself” (LFA 811, xv:35).¹⁰ Truth and skill, or what I will refer to in general as virtuosity, jostle elsewhere – in the lyric, for instance. Still, it is painting that “admits these two extremes more than any other art,” and permits them to develop independently – to “go free” (1823, Ms. 234).¹¹ This opposition requires many centuries of development before reaching maturity in the period following the Reformation. And as the debate between von Rumohr and the followers of Winckelmann displays, it is a tension still alive in Hegel’s world: “in no art has there been more dispute about ideal and nature” (LFA 813, xv:37).

The reason such a debate can emerge is that the structure of painting itself – two-dimensional, colored illusion – leaves it open in Hegel’s view to an emerging rift between the expression of content and the perfection of technique. But the rift between truth and virtuosity need not open if, to anticipate the central argument of this chapter, the latter can come, at least in certain cases, to invest and enliven the presentation of the former. The cases in which this is possible, moreover, will

9 It is “the art of *Schein* in general” (1826, Ms. 341).

10 “The picture is a work of art [*Kunstwerk*] and at the same time a feat [*Kunststück*] of semblance” (1826, Ms. 341–2; cf. 1820, Ms. 5).

11 This contrast does not arise in sculpture. In its classical origins, the sculpture just is the god. Here it is the logic of *substance*, not of essence and illusion, that holds sway.

be those in which the content of a painting suits the medium itself, the particular possibilities and limitations that distinguish it from both the three-dimensional figures of sculpture and the dimensionless figures of literature and music. Painting is the first of the romantic arts, and the content that suits it will be that of romantic art in general – the life of Christ, the life of the heart, and the life of “prose.” To show how this is so, we can begin by considering the three signal features of oil painting – framing, flatness, and glazing – that suit it to the evocation of both the inner and the outer life. Having done so, we will be in a position to appreciate the Dutch tradition with which this chapter is concerned.

The turn toward the romantic standpoint is, in its inception, a quiet affair. The chief achievement of the late classical period is the slave’s stoic discovery that, despite his manifest imprisonment, he is in fact a free being. With this realization, human life is reoriented toward the realm of inner experience – toward love in ethics and conscience in morals – that is, toward the Christian religion. Christianity, in turn, places demands upon the visual arts for the expression of psychological depth that sculpture can no longer meet. In the simple, powerful coherence of its *contrapposto*, the sculptural subject does exhibit a form of self-relation, or “interiority.” In Hegel’s view, this is the deep and unreflective calm, the “eternal repose with itself,” of the classical god (1826a, Ms. 340). Both “cold marble” and “sightless” eyes (1820, Ms. 185) are unable to articulate the “warmth” (1828, Ms. 127a) of human feeling so important to the culture founded by the slave. Consider that the eye is, for Hegel, both an organ of vision and a window to the soul (LFA 153, XIII:201). Sightlessness, accordingly, entails two related problems: a lack both of *self*-knowledge and of *other*-awareness. The sculpted god is, on the one hand, incapable of suffering. As against the Virgin Mary, Niobe “shows no anger” at her children’s murder (1820, Ms. 204). On the other hand, the sculpture is “indifferent to” the world around it (1820, Ms. 185), “unconcerned with the spectator” (1828, Ms. 128), an aloofness that suits the “cold[ness]” of the classical ideal (1823, Ms. 171; LFA 797, xv:17) and the coolness of its marble to the touch. Sculpture may be admired for its beauty, but it is in the painted figure, where the inner life first comes to consciousness, that we can see and feel ourselves.¹²

12 The subjects of painting are “self-knowers [*sich Wissenden*]” (1828, Ms. 134). It is an interesting question whether Greek sculpture, as Hegel presents it, evinces the quality of “absorption” in Michael Fried’s sense of that term. On the one hand, if

The failure of sculpture, and the promise of painting, concerns the fundamental observation, present in both Kant and Fichte, that self-awareness requires for its possibility a relationship to something outside it.¹³ The Apollo Belvedere cannot know himself because he can know *only* himself. But how is a painted Apollo any different? The answer is that while it is in the nature of sculpture to depict a single, freestanding subject, it is equally in the nature of painting to depict its subject in an environment, a material surround. This is a consequence, in Hegel's view, of the delimitation of the picture plane. The "excision [of the image] from the context must be marked ([by] the frame)," he observes, and it is in this way that "the character of statuary falls away" (1828, Ms. 128a). So long as we limit ourselves to the traditional range of painting supports with which Hegel was familiar – rectangles, squares, and the odd tondo (no "irregular polygons") – the idea makes sense. In sculpture, the "frame" of the work is organically generated by the figure it represents. In painting, by contrast, the shape of the frame is distinct from that of the represented figure, creating a negative space that belongs to the work itself and that presents the painter, much more readily than the sculptor, with an opportunity to fill it in. There is of course negative space in sculpture as well, manipulated with increasing sophistication in, for instance, Hellenistic art. The point, however, is that in sculpture negative space is *actual space* while in painting it is *painted space*, and thus belongs more properly to the work itself. Hegel does not distinguish the notion of negative space explicitly, but it is implied, I think, in his comments on Byzantine painting, the form that serves as the hinge between sculpture and painting proper. Byzantine art incorporates the negative spaces that surround its saints and patriarchs, but it does so merely by gilding them; in what we might call its negative use of negative space, then, Byzantine art preserves an essentially sculptural mode of representation. Beginning in the Middle Ages, however, and continuing into the Renaissance, the negative space is activated: "the whole empirical surround enters in"

absorption serves as a broad rubric for something like being-at-home (as Pippin reads it in "Authenticity in Painting: Remarks on Michael Fried's Art History," *Critical Inquiry*, 31, 3 [2005]), then, yes, the gods are absorbed. At the same time, however, the nature of their absorption, depending as it does upon a supposed ontological distinction between mortals and immortals, is one that frustrates the modern demand for autonomy and thereby leaves us cold.

13 Houlgate, "Hegel and the Art of Painting," 67.

(1828, Ms. 129), and “painting ... steps into the particular” (1823, Ms. 231; cf. 1820, Ms. 185).

In sculpture, the particularity of the body and its limbs had been governed by the soul or personality of the god. But in painting such thorough correspondence becomes impossible. The particulars of the natural world are presented not as they ought to be, but as they simply are; thus, “in the case of the birth of Christ and the Adoration of the Kings, oxen and asses, the manger and straw must not be left out.” The introduction of the particular makes possible here a degree of that self-knowledge that remained unavailable to the Apollo Belvedere; but that self-knowledge is at this point merely negative. The oxen and asses may serve as foils for the richness of the inner life (1820, Ms. 191) – the mystery of Christ’s divinity is in some way intensified by the fact that he arrives in a barn – but they cannot reflect that life back to itself.

Negativity enters the frame; the relationship of the inner to the outer, of Christ to his manger, is “truly contingent” (1820, Ms. 186); pressed to its conclusion, this tension begets a problem.¹⁴ The inner life must be expressed (*Wesen* must become *Erscheinung*). But if Christian inwardness is to remain consistent, the human subject must exhibit indifference not only to the world but “indeed to its own corporeality” (1820, Ms. 185). There is no principled difference between a human face and a pile of rocks. Particularity must be conceived *either* as entirely indifferent to the spirit’s inner depths, *or* as related essentially thereto. The first possibility, Hegel thinks, is explored in scenes of Christian martyrdom, where the naturalistic depiction of the suffering body and its “most horrible contortions” (1828, Ms. 134a) expresses the soul’s bliss as the inverse of its earthly pain. But spirit cannot find its satisfaction in torment, and martyrdom stands as “the border at which the art of painting can easily overstep its aim” (1820, Ms. 203).

For this reason, the second, reconciling alternative must be pursued. Painting’s first moment is its portrayal of the inner life; its second moment is naturalism; “the third ... is that this subjectivity ... relates itself at the same time to the now unfettered material, to the contingent sensuousness; and this subjectivity has its presentation, its external existence, in this contingent material alone; it shines therein” (1820, Ms. 186). A mature art of painting, in other words, pursues a naturalism constrained by an interest in the correspondence of the inner

14 Houlgate does not bring this out clearly enough in my view. It is important, at present, because it sets up the achievement of Dutch art.

and outer worlds. In Dutch art, the entrance of the “background” into the scene thus poses no principled threat to a painting’s unity. “[F]ree subjectivity,” Hegel observes, “can engage itself in everything particular” (1823, Ms. 232).

Painting’s second chief feature is its flatness. Whereas the shape of the picture plane encourages the entrance of ancillary detail in the space between the subject and the frame, its flatness requires and its colored pigments permit the development of illusionism. By replacing the *primary* quality of depth in space with the *secondary* qualities of tone and hue, painting “idealizes” the sculptural object’s third dimension and presents its content from what Hegel considers a more properly human, because more mind-dependent, point of view.¹⁵ Whereas the sculpture had remained indifferent to the viewer, in other words, the painting requires her. Sculpture cannot come into existence without artists, but once an artist has stepped away from his work, the shape he has created exists independently of human minds. Pictures, by contrast, are “engineered for the standpoint of the spectator” (1828, Ms. 127) in the sense that their contents, their illusionistic spaces, would not fully “exist” were it not for the imagination of that third dimension by human eyes. Because the painted subject depends upon, is “for,” the viewer, Hegel then suggests it is natural to understand the painting’s content in relationship to the viewer himself.¹⁶ In other words, though perhaps not in clearer ones, “everything ... in painting” has an implicit “relationship to the heart” (1823, Ms. 232). Hegel does not elaborate the idea in a way that can satisfy us, but the argument appears to be that looking at a painting is in some way a more intimate experience than looking at a sculpture insofar as our experience of the painting is to some extent made possible by our own participation, the contribution of our own spontaneity to the interpretation of the two-dimensional canvas as a three-dimensional space. Crudely, but in a way that will recur in Hegel’s theory of poetry as well, it appears that the investment of *attention* in the work generates a sort of *attachment* to its objects, perhaps as readers of a text become attached to, and tend to privilege in their interpretations, the observations, however minor, that they themselves have made. The idea that participation breeds attachment means that paintings are well suited to evoking feeling

15 Houlgate, “Hegel and the Art of Painting,” 64.

16 The object is “represented as standing in relation [*bezügliches*], in the first instance, to human beings” (1828, Ms. 128a).

in their spectators. And this, in turn, is why painting is well suited to emotional content, to tender scenes like the annunciation or the deposition from the cross.¹⁷ (Or, bluntly stated, “the fundamental trait [*Grundzug*] of painting” is “love” [1826a, Ms. 345–6].) Hegel’s argument is vigorously speculative here; it is interesting, if nothing else, and not obviously wrong.

A third feature of painting that suits it to romantic art is the semi-translucence of its oil glaze. The thought here is not one that will have occurred to most museumgoers, but it is certainly the sort of thing that occurred to Hegel. In permitting the interpenetration of the painting’s planes, the techniques of glazing and scumbling (the addition of, respectively, transparent or opaque layers of paint) makes possible a certain reconciliation of surface and depth, and, by extension, of the inner and outer life, the “two sides that had previously come apart” in the naturalistic treatment of Christ surrounded by donkeys, or else riding one of them. The “identity” of the life of feeling and the realm of objects is expressed paradigmatically in the painting of human flesh, for it is here, and especially in the “face and hands,” that the inner life, in the form of the heart’s blood, makes contact with the outer world. To capture this interaction – the blush or blanch in which the inner life “shines through” – the painter must not only manipulate pigments and shading; he must also master the illusion of depth created, in oil painting alone, by the process of glazing.¹⁸ It is this capacity to express the warmth of feeling, realized only in the later Renaissance, that permits painting’s “perfected anthropomorphism” (1820, Ms. 185). And doing so is remarkably difficult. Hegel cites Goethe’s translation of Diderot’s claim that “The man who has got the feel of flesh has already gone far ... Thousands of painters have died without having had this feeling, and thousands more will die without having had it” (LFA 847, xv:79). It is important to note here, however, that glazing is simply a technique and that its brilliant effects can be applied to natural objects as well as human flesh.¹⁹ Here too, as we will see in the case of landscape and genre painting, the aim can be the

17 “Feeling ... becomes here the chief form of the [external] existence [of subjective interiority], therefore the chief purpose of the presentation [itself]” (1828, Ms. 127). “Feeling ... is the chief means of reuniting [*der Identität*] the two sides that had earlier fallen apart” (1820, Ms. 186).

18 1820, Ms. 217–18; 1826, Ms. 356–7; on “depth” see 1828, Ms. 136a; see also Houlgate, “Hegel and the Art of Painting,” 66–7.

19 Some objects are better suited to “*durchscheinen*” than others – e.g. grapes permit it, whereas metal does not (1828, Ms. 136).

reconciliation of the inner with the outer, the subject with his environment, for the painter can lend the scene an echo, a “general resonance [*allgemeiner Klang*],” Hegel observes, of the soul. Such an echo is achieved when a picture’s “particular, contingent” objects “correspond to me [the feeling subject]” (1823, Ms. 233). We will return to this possibility below.

Painting’s three formal features – its frame, its flatness (and consequent need for colored illusion), and its glazing – encourage the representation of three sorts of content: the particularity of the natural world, the life of feeling, and the peculiarly living qualities of certain substances (flesh, grapes, and so on). It is the second moment that lies at the heart of Christian painting, but the first grows steadily in importance, for painting tends to “invest its every subject” with great detail (LFA 853, xv:87; 1823, Ms. 240), Hegel observes, and this requires “great artistry” to bring off (1828, Ms. 129). Eventually the tension becomes explicit: it is unclear what the relationship is between the vivid depiction of donkeys and shepherds and the profound emotional significance of the birth of Christ. In genre painting, the donkeys remain and the Christ child goes, a solution that seems to resolve the tension in favor of mere naturalism. But the point of painting’s second formal feature, the ideality of the representation, is not simply that it privileges scenes of love (the Pietà, the Madonna and Child). It is rather that, as we saw above, “everything ... in painting” has an implicit “relationship to the heart” (1823, Ms. 232), that a curiously emotional intimacy emerges between the spectator and the painted object in a way that had been impossible in sculpture. Considering this notion of intimacy, or *Innigkeit*, will lead us in turn to a partition of three principal forms – religious, landscape, and genre painting – the last of which will occupy us for the remainder of the chapter.

The forms of painting

Common to sculpture and painting is the effort to embody the Idea as the reconciliation of outer form and inner feeling, body and soul. Hegel’s general term for the self-relation this union involves is “inwardness [*Innerlichkeit*].” In classical art, inwardness appears as the “repose” of the sculptured physique, as the expression of its “deepest form” (1826a, Ms. 340; cf. LFA 443, xiv:33). In romantic art, this inwardness

has been deepened by an awareness of the limitations of corporeal form. The reconciliation of soul and body cannot be *seen*, read off the body itself, but must be *felt* in the expressive nuance of the eyes and mouth. Hegel's term for this differentiated romantic inwardness is *Innigkeit*: "ardor," or "intimacy,"²⁰ though the word retains a figurative sense that makes it difficult to define.²¹ The difference between the classical and the romantic is here again the difference between primary and secondary qualities. Feeling, like color, depends for its existence upon the spontaneity of the viewer, and *Innigkeit* represents the standpoint of feeling in general, an affective mode of access to the world unknown to the "sightless" sculptures of the Greeks (LFA 797, xv:17).²²

Painting's fundamental trait, we saw earlier, is "love." As a matter of fact, the masterpieces of Western painting have often taken its forms (filial, agapic, erotic) as their subject. As a matter of principle, love is appropriate to art in general because it takes the form of a reconciled opposition,²³ and it is appropriate to romantic art in particular because this reconciliation is achieved inwardly, as the felt interdependence of two subjects. Considered most fully, as a practice or human possibility, love is an ethical relationship. Considered as a *feeling* alone, as the intuited awareness of utter mutuality with another being, love is intimacy, or *Innigkeit*.²⁴

The framed structure of the painting, we saw above, permits and requires the incorporation of particularity, and thus the acknowledgement of negativity. But the acknowledgement of negativity is also characteristic of the content of romantic art in general, as we saw

20 *Innigkeit* is thus characteristic of romantic art in general. Cf. LFA 80–1, 801, 812.

21 This vagueness may belong to the concept itself. An early use of the term occurs in a defense of the study of Greek and Latin in the gymnasial address of September 29, 1809. "Die Sprache ist das musikalische Element, das Element der Innigkeit, das in der Übertragung verschwindet, – der feine Duft, durch den die Sympathie der Seele sich zu genießen gibt, aber ohne den ein Werk der Alten nur schmeckt wie Rheinwein, der verduftet ist" (iv:320). Like a fragrance, *Innigkeit* is, quite literally, difficult to put into words (i.e. to translate).

22 For the place of "intimacy" in painting as against sculpture, see LFA 732, xiv:389.

23 This structure is that of "life in self in another" (LFA 533), in Hegel's poetic phrase. "Diese Innigkeit, welche dem Begriff des in sich befriedigten freien Geistes allein entspricht, ist die Liebe" (LFA 539, xiv:154; emphasis mine).

24 "This life in self in another" mentioned above "is, as *feeling*, the intimacy of love" (LFA 533, xiv:146; emphasis mine). The notion of intimacy features prominently in the discussions of love and the family in the *Philosophy of Right*. The substantial underpinning of marriage is "*Innigkeit und Gesinnung*" (PR §173; cf. §167).

toward the end of [chapter 1](#). In the art of feeling, the particular and the negative is the fact of desire as such, the attitude that characterizes an agent's first and most primitive forms of practical engagement with her world. The satisfaction of desire is felt as pleasure, and its frustration as pain.²⁵ Love, meanwhile, is neither the satisfaction nor the frustration of desire, but the elevation and overcoming of its transience in the more stable exchange of mutual regard.²⁶ Central to this stability, however, is a recollection of that pain behind the consciousness of bliss, and the romantic painter must find a way to introduce this canceled negativity into the experience of the picture. In the case of Christian painting, this is easily managed, for Christian love is by its nature "born of sacrifice" (1826a, Ms. 345). Without this tincture of the negative, this record of struggle, the reconciliation presented in scenes of love would not be entirely credible. "The fundamental character of painting," Hegel says, is that the soul "appea[r] not so much as *free*, but as *freed*, as having overcome natural particularity [and] pain" (1826a, Ms. 345).²⁷ Intimacy is the feeling of interdependence colored by the recollection of solitude.²⁸

The notion of *Innigkeit* features in the discussions of the modern arts in general (music, lyric poetry), but it is worth spending time on it here because it provides Hegel with the structuring principle of his taxonomy of romantic painting's forms, each of which is defined by the class of objects to which it grants the viewer intimacy.²⁹ Religious painting, the first of these, makes possible this felt rapport with the central figures of Christian ethical life: Mary, the infant Jesus, and the Magdalene.³⁰ (God himself is not included, for the painted visage must be graced by notes of suffering unsuited to his majesty.) The northern and southern traditions differ in the degree of negativity they admit. The Italians succeed in portraying a grief that is "more ecstatic than harmful, a rather abstract, richly soulful suffering which proceeds in the inner life" rather than finding manifestation in "physical

²⁵ PhS §§167–74.

²⁶ PR §163.

²⁷ My emphasis; contrast the Christian capacity for memory with the endless present of the Greek gods, a distinction Nietzsche was to make much of in his work on *ressentiment*.

²⁸ "The soul must show that it has arrived at this intimacy, this triumph – that is the highest character, the most ideal aspect [*das Idealste*] of the objectivity of painting" (1826a, Ms. 345).

²⁹ See LFA 814–37 and its source, 1823, Ms. 236–40.

³⁰ The feeling it offers is thus a "substantial intimacy" (1823, Ms. 236).

agony" (LFA 873, xv:113). Such agony comes to prominence by contrast, in German painting, which "goes on to horrible grimaces and ... unbridled passions" (LFA 884, xv:126; cf. 882, xv:124). The Germans tend in this direction because of their greater interest in painterly naturalism, or "portrait-like depiction" (LFA 829, xv:56). Strict fidelity to nature, however, permits a "lack of correspondence between the feeling and the visible forms in which piety is expressed"; but painting, "so far as possible, must produce a harmony between inner and outer" (LFA 829, xv:56), "between a figure and its expression" (LFA 873, xv:112; cf. 1823, Ms. 238–40). For this reason, Christian painting peaks in Italy.

Landscape, the second kind of painting, takes as its object that which is "plainly external." Hegel's discussion is brief, and the significance of landscape seems to be largely the transition it affords from religious to genre painting. In the intimation of inner depth expressed by the tints of the flesh and the expressions of the face, Christian painting achieves a substantive treatment of an important but relatively narrow range of human experience. It is in the nature of the negative space introduced by the painting's frame, however, to invite the background into the painting and thus to drive representation toward particularity and naturalism. Applying the painterly techniques developed in religious art to the realm of nature, the landscapist finds there an "echo" of human moods and concerns (LFA 831, xv:60) that is in turn modeled on the reciprocities of love. If landscape expands the realm of intimacy, however, allowing us to "possess in nature a spiritual depth of our own" (LFA 832, xv:60), it seems to lack the negativity of Christian art. "A love born of sacrifice" (1826a, Ms. 345) can hardly enter into the depiction of "hills, mountains, woods, glens, [and] rivers" (LFA 831, xv:60).

A "third and last kind of intimacy" finds expression in the painting of "our everyday surroundings" (LFA 833, xv:61), a broad designation that comprises genre, still life, and portraiture (LFA 832, xv:60).³¹ Like the landscapist, the genre painter attempts to endow a trivial content with significant human feeling, and the sphere of representation is again expanded. This interest in expansion is not the only motive for the artist's turn toward genre subjects, however. Christian painters

31 Hegel distinguishes between the painting of "insignificant objects torn from their living environment" (i.e. still life) and "scenes of human life" (i.e. genre) (LFA 832, xv:60). Portraiture is discussed further on (LFA 865 ff., xv:103).

took as the essence of human life a set of deep and moral emotions. But the attempt to draw a hard line between essence and illusion, between that which truly matters in human life and that which does not, purchases satisfaction at the price of exclusion, and efforts at exclusion come to grief, on Hegel's view. Painting must eventually "negate the immediacy of feeling [the Christian awareness of salvation], must be active and must act" (1820, Ms. 187). For only in his "involvement with concrete reality" does "the free subjective individual ... prove himself in his own eyes to be concrete and living" (LFA 803, xv:25). The modern artist must thus take "delight ... in what is *there*," must evince "contentment with self, with the finitude of man and, generally, with the finite" (LFA 573-4, xiv:196).³²

If this contentment is to matter, however, is to allow for a meaningful intimacy with that finitude, the genre painter must be able to intimate the sort of negativity absent in the art of landscape and present (crudely) in the northern painting of Christian martyrs and (subtly) in the Italian evocation of a "smiling through tears" (LFA 158, XIII:209).³³ Where in a scene of smoking or of sewing by lamplight, we may well wonder, can there be a recollection of pain? Hegel's answer, as we will see in greater detail in the [section](#) on beauty and liveliness below, is that genre painting substitutes for the explicit negativity of sorrow and grief the implicit negativity of limitation and triviality. Thus modern pictures tend to confront us with "the poverty and accidental character of [their] material" (LFA 833, xv:62), he notes, and this poverty just is the negativity of ordinary life. "[O]bjects that are of themselves entirely insignificant ... can appear base to us," Hegel observes. Trivial actions "can, of themselves, have something repugnant about them" (1823, Ms. 239). This observation lies at the heart of the account of Dutch painting I will offer. For if it is "the sense of coziness and comfort that shows itself" (1826a, Ms. 285) in this art, there exists nonetheless that background

32 "In his present world," Hegel argues, "[modern] man wants to see the present itself, in its present liveliness, recreated by art as his own human and spiritual work, even at the cost of sacrificing beauty and ideality of content" (LFA 574, xiv:196).

33 This smiling through tears is in fact the sublated form of laughter itself: "[T]hough laughter pertains to the natural soul, hence is an anthropological phenomenon, it ranges from the vulgar peals of side-splitting laughter of an empty-headed or uneducated person to the gentle smile of the noble soul, to a smiling through tears, a series of gradations in which it frees itself more and more from its merely natural mode until in smiling it becomes a *gesture*, that is, something originating in the free will" (PS §401Z, x:114).

of pain and limitation that is required for all romantic painting and that makes possible a genuine *Innigkeit*, a “love for the most external, most immediate objects” (1826a, Ms. 285).³⁴ Dutch painting “shows how the individuals portrayed ... have acquired mundane virtues, fidelity, [and] steadfastness.” And yet these individuals appear at first as “troubled by mundane affairs” and “enwrapped in the cares of life” (LFA 882, xv:124). Before turning to the details of this account, however, it is worth pausing to meet an objection about the extent to which Hegel’s modern German audience can really come to care about or imaginatively invest themselves in the minutiae of life in the lowlands.

The availability of Dutch art

Hegel is careful to preface his lectures on Dutch genre painting with an account of the cultural and historical contexts from which it emerged.³⁵ The two salient aspects here are the nation’s humble origins and its path of self-determination.³⁶ The Dutch have freed themselves, Hegel likes to observe, from a superior temporal power (the Spanish crown), a spiritual orthodoxy (the Catholic Church), and the elements themselves (the North Sea).³⁷ Their painting of ordinary life is thus in an important sense a celebration of their autonomy, of “the circumstances they had themselves achieved” (1820, Ms. 193).³⁸ While the history of every modern nation (save Switzerland) has been shaped by political and economic elites, the Dutch are “a nation of fishermen, sailors, burghers and peasants” (LFA 597, xiv:225). As such, they are

34 For a fuller discussion of *Gemütlichkeit*, or coziness, see the section on song and nation in chapter 4.

35 In order “to frame a complete judgment on [the Dutch] in our consideration of painting’s history, we must ... visualize again the national situation in which it had its origin” (LFA 885, xv:128).

36 “This citizenship, this love of enterprise, in small things as in great, in their own land as well as on the high seas, this painstaking as well as cleanly and neat well-being, this joy and exuberance in their own sense that for all this they have their own activity to thank, all this is what constitutes the general content of their pictures” (LFA 169, xiii:222–3).

37 “[W]hat nature affords directly to other nations,” Hegel observes, the Dutch “have had to acquire by hard struggles and bitter industry [*Fleiß*]” (LFA 597, xiv:226). There is a self-made, bootstrapping sensibility that appeals here to the Fichtean strain in Hegel’s social thought.

38 “In the enjoyment of the coziness they have won for themselves through their courage and their pious cast of mind – it is in this sense,” Hegel argues, “that [the Dutch] have this love for the most external, most immediate objects” (1826a, Ms. 285).

natively at home in life's prose: "from the start they have attended to the value of what is necessary and useful in the greatest and smallest things" and have championed the middle-class values of "industry [*Fleiß*]" and "frugality" (LFA 598, xiv:226). In this way, the Dutch have not only won their freedom *negatively*, like the revolutionary French. They have also managed to do so without losing their footing in a form of life, and their tradition of genre painting suggests the *positive* freedom, the sense of being at home, that is their greatest achievement.

Gethmann-Siefert has argued that a tradition of painting concerned with the celebration of a small nation's historical struggles has little to say to the nineteenth century at large. After all, she observes, if Dutch art retained its meaning for Hegel and his contemporaries, he would not need to preface his discussions with the sort of account just sketched.³⁹ The argument is reasonable enough, but the evidence of the lectures does not sustain it. What is foreign about Dutch art, Hegel thinks, is not the particular vision of freedom it projects (domestic life), but the fact that it projects *only* this vision. "To no other people, under its different circumstances," he observes, "would it occur to make into *the principal burden* of its works of art subjects like those confronting us in Dutch painting" (LFA 598, xiv:226; emphasis mine). To a modern German audience whose tastes remain substantially shaped by the French Academic hierarchy of history, landscape, genre, and still life, the notion that a culture's deepest concerns could be reflected in household scenes alone would have seemed peculiar. But the difference between the Dutch and German audiences is thus one of degree, not of kind, and a quick lecture can put the latter in a position to appreciate the work.

Gethmann-Siefert is led to the view that Dutch art is no longer fully available to modern audiences because she thinks that its meaning is, for Hegel, essentially commemorative and historical.⁴⁰ But while

39 A. Gethmann-Siefert, "Schöne Kunst und Prosa des Lebens. Hegels Rehabilitierung des ästhetischen Genusses" in C. Jamme, ed., *Kunst und Geschichte im Zeitalter Hegels* (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1996), 142; cf. "Hegel über Kunst und Alltäglichkeit. Zur Rehabilitierung der schönen Künste und des ästhetischen Genusses," *Hegel-Studien* 28 (1993), 257.

40 Its value to modern audiences is historical as well: Hegel and his students are free to enjoy the masterpieces that grace the new museum on the Spree, but only in order to "thematize the worldview of a certain bygone state" (Gethmann-Siefert, "Einleitung [1823]," clxxvii) and thereby cultivate a "historical self-consciousness" ("Schöne Kunst und Prosa des Lebens," 149; cf. "Einleitung [1826]," xlv). In particular, Gethmann-Siefert thinks, they make us receptive to other worldviews, e.g.

it is true that the Dutch devotion to daily life cannot be understood without a sense of its liberation from Spain, that liberation does not exhaust the meaning of Dutch art. The great works of the Dutch are not commemorations of their naval victories, after all, but of the world those victories made possible. Hegel distinguishes accordingly between the immediate meaning of Dutch painting, what he calls the “empirical” justification of its subject matter, and a properly philosophical defense of its appropriation of the trivial, one undertaken “more from the standpoint of the Concept” (1820, Ms. 192–3). A complete account of this latter justification will require an account of what Hegel calls the “liveliness,” or *Lebendigkeit*, of Dutch painting. But it is clear from the lectures that the meaning of this tradition exceeds that of its own narrow history and is thus available to a modern audience.⁴¹

Hegel is quite explicit here. The Dutch painters “wanted to rejoice ... in the conditions they had acquired for themselves,” and “if we bring with us a corresponding sense for given objects [*Naturgegenstände*], then we too will rejoice in ... Dutch painting” (1820, Ms. 193). Hotho’s edition shows what this “corresponding sense” might be. “If we can call any particular trend of mind ‘*deutsch*’ [Dutch or German],” Hegel observes, “it is this loyal, comfortable, homely bourgeois type,” one that dwells “in a self-respect without pride, in a piety without the mere enthusiasm of a devotee ... [and] an ancestral soundness in thorough carefulness and contentedness in all its circumstances along with independence and advancing freedom, while still being true to its traditional morality” (LFA 886, xv:129). In spite of Hegel’s distaste for nationalist nostalgia – the “*Deutschdumm*” of the Romantics – we

that of cheerfulness (“*Schöne Kunst und Prosa des Lebens*,” 140) as against Teutonic “subjectiv[ity]” (141).

41 Gethmann-Siefert’s effort to explain how genre scenes are in fact complex references to – “symbols of” – the achievements of Dutch history involves her in a complex and, to my mind, unsuccessful series of arguments (“*Schöne Kunst und Prosa des Lebens*,” 136 ff.). For one, a “symbol” must on Hegel’s view not only designate its referent, but instantiate or exemplify its properties, as the fox does cunning, or the circle eternity (LFA 304, xiii:395). But what qualities can a painting of an old woman sewing by lamplight instantiate (1823, Ms. 186)? Certainly not the revolutions of the late sixteenth century. Gethmann-Siefert’s way of getting around this problem is to say that the virtuosity of the painter’s treatment of color leads the viewer to treat the content of the painting “reflexively,” and thus to meditate on the causal antecedents, the wars and dykes, that have made the sewing by lamplight possible. The textual evidence for this view is not strong.

find him here celebrating a certain *Deutschklug*. Hegel was astounded on his 1822 visit to the Netherlands by the country's cleanliness, prosperity, and bourgeois vitality. "Holland presented a picture of what modern life could be," Pinkard writes, "and Hegel found his views of what he was trying to accomplish in Germany affirmed by everything he was seeing and experiencing."⁴² There is every reason to suspect that a German public unnerved by revolution but increasingly committed to reform will find itself sympathetic to an art that celebrates simplicity, thrift, and self-reliance. "[O]ther nations have tended to disdain this [interest in everydayness]," Hegel notes. "Our German art, however, has entered into the sphere of immediate actuality" (1823, Ms. 185).

On the one hand, then, there is a particular affinity between nineteenth-century Germany and seventeenth-century Holland. On the other hand, however, it is not the value of Dutch painting alone that interests Hegel but of genre painting as such, a form that "speaks to every uncorrupt mind and free heart" and remains "an object in which it participates and takes joy" (LFA 833, xv:62).⁴³ In the final series of lectures in particular, Hegel shows that the reanimation of daily life pursued in genre subjects has been achieved across Europe. He admires the Spanish painter Murillo (LFA 170, XIII:224) and praises the Italians for showing us "the joyful, self-reposing life and pursuits of the bourgeoisie," their "vitality, well-being in the present, [and] witty spirit," the "reawakened sense of pleasure in what they themselves produce," and in all this the sense of "reconciliation with existence" (1828, Ms. 134).⁴⁴ The Italian sensibility is not identical to the Dutch: it is more capacious, or at least more Catholic, allowing religious and secular subjects to thrive side

42 Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 512.

43 "The uncorrupt, free mind as well will take joy in liveliness as such, for example in the liveliness and joviality of the Dutch farmers" (1820, Ms. 193). Winckelmann's influence is partly to blame for this corruption. "Great objections have been made against painting," Hegel notes, "and it has been blamed for the fact that the greatest painters have taken on common objects and thus debased art [itself]. Here it is the feelings of connoisseurs that are held sacred, not of men" (1820, Ms. 191).

44 Though this view of Italian painting seems to have been shaped by Hegel's study of von Rumohr, he mentions as early as 1823 the fact that trivial subjects have been explored by Italian painters (1823, Ms. 235). The international success of genre painting gives the lie to Gethmann-Siefert's attempt to find the meaning of Dutch genre painting exclusively in the nation's history.

by side.⁴⁵ (Again, the peculiarity of Dutch art is its *exclusive* focus on daily life.) Nonetheless, it is clear that genre painting is a substantially similar project in Holland and Italy; both traditions express that “pleasure in what they themselves produce” that is the hallmark of bourgeois freedom. I am not suggesting that Hegel calls for his contemporaries to begin painting in precisely this way. But it is no wonder that he views the achievements of the genre painters as a source of interest and pleasure in his own day.

I noted above that genre painting draws its negativity, and thus its interest, from the frustrating limitations of daily life. Gethmann-Siefert, who sees the meaning of Dutch art as a “symbolization” of its history, would disagree, for in her view the contingencies of the everyday are redeemed simply insofar as they follow from the liberation from Spanish rule.⁴⁶ The problem with this view is that the negative freedom the Dutch have won is only half of their achievement. Episodes of teeth extraction cannot appear vital and significant simply because they have been “freely” undertaken, for this freedom may be that of *Willkür* (caprice). Dutch painting must not only suggest what the nation has been freed *from*, in other words, but show what it has been freed *for*. Hegel’s remarks on the dispiriting banality of modern life, the “repugnance” of everyday scenes, suggest that this is a difficult task. And it is precisely this difficulty that makes Dutch art, and genre painting in general, important, for the sense of creeping insignificance (of which Nietzsche is the great Jeremiah) afflicts the modern era as such.

The classical hero was at home in his world, but the romantic artist is forced either to ignore the world, viewing it as a proving ground for Judgment Day, or to oppose it, discovering in northern painting the corruption of the body and in Shakespearean tragedy the corruption of the public. Unlike Greek poetry and sculpture, then, “romantic art no longer has as its aim the free vitality [*Lebendigkeit*] of existence ... or *this life* as such in its very own essential nature” (LFA 526–7, XIV:139). Genre painting is a new kind of romantic art, however, for as we will

45 Thus a religious painter like Raphael is mentioned in connection with the enlivenment of bourgeois life: “This element brought art towards [*entgegen*] its perfection. The sense for the present, [for] liveliness; [the sense] that form and even color itself should be soulful, [should be] conceived and expressed not as the figure’s outer scaffolding, but as something significant. This [opposition of inner and outer] has united itself in Raphael” (1828, Ms. 134).

46 Gethmann-Siefert, “Schöne Kunst und Prosa des Lebens,” 140.

see it is precisely an art of “*this life*” and of the “free liveliness” it possesses.⁴⁷ Hegel’s notion of liveliness, or *Lebendigkeit*, is central to his account of the achievement of Dutch art and we must pause to consider it and to differentiate it from the more familiar notion of beauty.

It is also central, we should note, to the debate over the end of art surveyed in the previous chapter. Danto’s account of that end was grounded in the well-known passage from the Introduction in which Hegel speaks of art’s having “lost for us genuine truth and life” (LFA 11, XIII:25). But “life” here is “*Lebendigkeit*.” Consider the following passage from the 1826 lectures: “We adhere now [in modernity] to more general points of view in order to determine the particular. For the production of art we require more liveliness [*Lebendigkeit*], in which the universal shall be identical with the heart. Insofar as [*Insofern*] we lack this liveliness, one can say that the standpoint from which art possesses an essential interest is no longer ours” (1826b, Ms. 3a). Taking Hegel’s “*insofern*” to suggest that this lack admits of degrees, we can note here the same mix of pessimism and open-mindedness that characterizes Hegel’s programmatic statements on modern art throughout the 1820s. (This patience would then be rewarded with the “genuinely living [*lebendiger*] poetry” (LFA 20, XIII:37) that has appeared in Germany in recent years.) The point here is that the possibility of modern art is framed in terms of the possibility of a dynamic interaction between the general and the particular, the universal standpoint of philosophy and “the heart.” Dutch painting will succeed precisely by suggesting the possibility that this relationship has gone dead, and then by finding a way to reanimate it.

Beauty and liveliness

Excepting the *Philosophy of Nature*, in which it is introduced, the term *Leben* and its cognates, *Lebendigkeit* chief among them, occur more frequently in the *Aesthetics* than in any of Hegel’s other major works. They occur with particular frequency in two important contexts: those of classical sculpture, the pinnacle of beauty, and of romantic painting. “The form of painting,” Hegel argues, “is properly the form of *liveliness* . . . Liveliness is soulfulness, the chief thing in painting.” And again: “in the judgment of painting one must adhere chiefly to the consideration

47 In the previous chapter, I distinguished this new kind of romantic art, the art of the banal, from that of the ugly and the beautiful.

of liveliness (1820, Ms. 193, 194).⁴⁸ The term can bear a variety of senses. In Hotho's edition, it refers to living things,⁴⁹ to lifelikeness,⁵⁰ and vitality.⁵¹ Underlying all of these, however, is a more primitive notion of dynamism or "livingness." To see what this amounts to, we may consider Hegel's views on what it means to be alive.⁵²

"If we examine our ordinary view about life," Hegel offers, "what it implies is the idea of the body, and the idea of the soul." A body ensouled is an "organic articulation": that is, a differentiated structure (body) governed by an organizing principle (soul). This soul is a "form which has the power to maintain itself, as form, in its content" (LFA 118, XIII:160), and the body thus comprises "not parts but members" (cf. 1823, Ms. 50). As universal and particular, soul and body stand in a relationship of productive opposition. Life is a "constant process" that "consists precisely in positing contradiction in itself, enduring it, and overcoming it" (LFA 120, XIII:162).⁵³ (In this way, life expresses "the immediate Idea," the first, crude embodiment of reconciled opposition.⁵⁴) Guided by its organizing principle, the living being is able to exhibit a degree of independence from

48 The term is always prominent in Hegel's discussions of the Dutch. The object of genre painting is glossed as "liveliness, of whatever sort [*irgendeine Lebendigkeit*]" (1823, Ms. 186). "The emergence of [mature Dutch] art was at the same time an enlivening [*Beleben*] of the objects of painting." They achieved "not only liveliness of expression, but also of action" (1826a, Ms. 344).

49 For example, "Life in nature [*die natürliche Lebendigkeit*]" (LFA 123, XIII:167).

50 The painter reproduces "entirely true to life [*in dieser Lebendigkeit*]" what has so impressed him" (LFA 938, xv:197). This notion of lifelikeness is to be distinguished, of course, from that of naturalism (mere mimetic fidelity) (LFA 833–4, xv:61; 1820, Ms. 193–4).

51 For example, "art, considered in its highest vocation ... has lost for us genuine truth and life [*Lebendigkeit*]" (LFA 11, XIII:25). In music, Hegel contrasts a "*lebendig Production*" to "*gelehrter Übung*" (LFA 950, xv:212).

52 I was not familiar with any discussion of *Lebendigkeit* in relation to the *Aesthetics* until Pippin's in "The Absence of Aesthetics in Hegel's Aesthetics" in F.C. Beiser, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 400–2. He is interested in *Lebendigkeit* here not (as I am) as a property of works of art, but as a state of the observer. He suggests that a passage on the *Beleben* of the faculties from the Introduction (LFA 46, XIII:70) is the "closest [Hegel] ever gets to an account of distinctly aesthetic experience" ("Absence of Aesthetics," 400).

53 In plants, this is the process of growth; in animals, growth is supplemented by locomotion. The animal posits a contradiction between where it is at present and where it would like to be; in locomotion this opposition is overcome.

54 *Hegel's Logic: Being Part One of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* [1830], trans. Wallace (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), §216. Cf. LFA 118 ff., XIII:160 ff.

the external world; indeed, “liveliness consists in such a self-enclosed system” (1823, Ms. 66). The living being is differentiated and complex; still, “there is nothing meaningless or inexpressive; everything is active and effective” (LFA 617, XIV:249). In fact, the organism’s degree of liveliness appears to correspond to the degree to which its members enjoy such integration.⁵⁵

Given Hegel’s conception of the work of art, the notion of liveliness travels easily into the aesthetic register.⁵⁶ In nature, liveliness amounts to a dynamic harmony of body and soul. Applied metaphorically to the work of art, liveliness would be a dynamic harmony of, among other things, content and form. Such a harmony is of course quite close to the notion of beauty, but it is not identical with it, and the fact that it is not identical is crucial for an interpretation of Dutch genre painting, which *must* be lively, in Hegel’s view, but which *cannot* be beautiful. We now need to say what beauty is. There are two kinds.

Formal beauty, the beauty of nature and of the natural elements of works of art, consists in the harmony, the perfect mutual adequation, of form and *matter*.⁵⁷ Formal beauty emerges as the last of three conceptual moments: regularity (the repetition of the self-same, as in a colonnade); symmetry (the repetition of the self-different, as in a pattern); and lawlikeness (*Gesetzmässigkeit*) (organization according to an unstatable rule, or purposiveness without a purpose). As instances of lawlikeness, Hegel mentions the harmonies of the color wheel (red, yellow, blue), of the musical scale (first, third, fifth), and of the enigmatic S-curve, or ogee, Hogarth’s “line of beauty” (1823, Ms. 60–2).⁵⁸ The first two stages exhibit something like internal organization, but

55 The human form is livelier than that of other animals insofar as our glabrous flesh expresses, as noted earlier, the interaction of blood and skin. The animal body, swathed in feathers, scales, or fur, keeps this opposition from coming into view (LFA 145–6, XIII:194).

56 “It is the way that the organic lines flow gently into one another, along with the most conscientious elaboration of the parts,” Hegel writes, “that alone provides the air [*Duft*] of liveliness, that delicacy and ideal unity of all the parts, that harmony which pervades the whole like a spiritual breath [*Hauch*] of ensoulment” (LFA 726, XIV:381; cf. 837, XV:67).

57 Hegel speaks here of a “formal” liveliness as well (1823, Ms. 71) and relates this to natural beauty: it is “according to its determination as liveliness, as a unity of members, that we call an appearance of the natural [world] beautiful” (1823, Ms. 53).

58 “Though all sorts of waving-lines are ornamental, when properly applied; yet, strictly speaking, there is but one precise line, properly to be called the line of *beauty*.” W. Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty* (London: W. Hogarth, 1810 [1753]), 49.

they are not yet beautiful; formal beauty itself emerges, following Kant, only at this third stage.⁵⁹

Ideal beauty, or the beauty of art, consists in the harmony, the perfect mutual adequation, of form and *content*.⁶⁰ Hegel's conception is a subtle but consequential revision of the theory of beauty he had inherited from Goethe and Alois Hirt. Hirt had argued that a beautiful work is one in which "nothing is to be otiose or superfluous," which happens when nothing "enter[s] the work of art except what belongs to the ... expression of [its] content alone" (LFA 18, XIII:35). (Note the resemblance to liveliness, in which "there is nothing meaningless or inexpressive.") The limitation of this view, for Hegel, is that it conceives the relationship as the adequation of form to content alone, and not vice versa. Hegel's innovation is to insist that content itself must be adequate to the form (LFA 70, XIII:100). The reasons for this demand derive from Hegel's notion of art as a form of communication. Neoclassical theories of beauty as a harmony in diversity tend to be framed in strictly formal terms.⁶¹ Hegel, as we have seen him do in his theory of creativity, adapts the language of previous aesthetic theories to his own content-based philosophy of art. What is original in his account is the idea that a work's beauty can be marred not only by inexpressive or superfluous formal elements (decoration, digression, and so forth) but by unexpressed content.⁶² Insisting upon the mutuality of the form-content relationship allows Hegel to declare the beautiful work the most thoroughly realized embodiment of reconciled

59 Here I follow the discussion in the 1823 lectures. In Hotho's edition, regularity and symmetry are collapsed into one moment (a), followed by lawlikeness (b), and finally 'harmony' (c) (LFA 134–41, XIII:179–88). Nothing of importance seems to hang on this point.

60 There is a sense in which even natural objects possess a content, though it is a content that exists only implicitly, or "for us." An animal's existence is "about" something, after all: namely, the guiding purpose of its own self-preservation (1823, Ms. 66; LFA 145, XIII:192–3). To speak of such purposes in nature is, in Kant's terms, to make a judgment of "objective purposiveness." For Hegel, by contrast, these purposes are perfectly real.

61 Hutcheson's "uniformity amidst variety" or Augustine's claim that "unity is the universal form of beauty."

62 As in the "Och!" and "O!" of *Sturm und Drang* drama. Such interjections have nothing to do with the sublimity of Romanticism, which is a theoretical position on the possibility of meaning in general; instead, Hegel suggests that the profundity of the Germanic temperament simply tends toward inarticulateness and thus "the vigour of mere interjections" (LFA 235, XIII:305).

opposition that is possible, and thus the complete presentation to the senses of “the Idea.”⁶³

We do not yet have a clear distinction between beauty and liveliness, but it is worth noting at this point that the latter does not demand the same strict adequacy of content and form. Instead, as suggested by the notion of “life” as such – that “constant process” of “positing contradiction in itself, enduring it, and overcoming it” – liveliness can involve a looser and more dynamic fit between the two related elements (body and soul, inner and outer, content and form, and so on). To develop the contrast, we need to unfold the consequences of Hegel’s particularly strict definition of beauty. The most important formula Hegel offers, if not the most immediately clear, is this one: for beauty to be possible, “the outer must harmonize with an inner which is harmonious in itself, and, just on that account, can reveal itself as itself in the outer” (LFA 155, XIII:205). A work is beautiful, then, when its form harmonizes with a self-harmonious content. The obvious question here is what a self-harmonious content is, but first I’d like to ask why we might expect this requirement to begin with. The answer is that the form of the beautiful work is *itself* self-harmonious.

Let’s figure out what this means. The beautiful artwork is formally as well as artistically beautiful, and formal beauty, as we have seen, is itself a harmony of form and matter. (A sculpture of Apollo is formally beautiful, say, insofar as its unified composition, its network of lines and planes, is realized in a material, marble, whose own purity reflects and is suited to that compositional unity.) Keeping the artwork’s formal beauty in mind leads us to *expect* that its content must be internally complex. Form and content must harmonize completely, and if one of them is self-harmonious, the other must be as well. Ideal beauty is

63 If Hegel accords beauty a certain privilege among the other values of art, it is because beauty is the most immediate form of artistic expression – it is reconciliation that can be seen all at once, as it were – and since art is itself the “immediate” moment of absolute spirit, beauty is the value of art that treats it most purely *as art*. Another way to put the point is in terms of the Schillerian integration of the personality discussed in the section on building the case for indispensability in chapter 1. When amid the artwork’s “shapes and sounds” a connection to “higher spiritual interests” is discerned, then “the sensuous aspect of art is *spiritualized*, since the spirit appears in art as made *sensuous*” (LFA 39, XIII:61). The experience of beauty spiritualizes and redeems the senses insofar as it allows us to make non-standard usage of them, to employ them as elements in a process of self-reflection rather than as instruments in the pursuit of immediate experience.

thus a sort of second-order harmony, the harmony of a harmonious content and a harmonious form.⁶⁴ It is worth insisting on this point for two reasons. First, Hegel's conception of beauty demands that we understand it as the most thoroughgoing harmony imaginable (LFA 157, XIII:207–8). The fact that this remarkably complex harmony was in fact realized, in his view, in statues of Apollo goes some way toward explaining why he was able to think of Greek art as such a singularity, as the achievement of three or four generations around which he could organize an entire history of art's thousand-year approach and two-thousand-year decline. The second reason that the notion of beauty as a second-order harmony matters is that it helps us see why the beauty of sculpture is particularly "pure" (LFA 777, XIV:443), as Hegel calls it, and more perfect than that of tragedy. For though in its capacity to portray courses of action the latter is richer and deeper in its content, its lack of formal self-sufficiency (a reliance upon language, acting, gesture, costume, and so on) deprives it of that genuine coherence, that formal beauty, which the purity of marble and the simple unity of the human frame provide.⁶⁵

We can now consider the notion of a self-harmonious content, or of what Hegel elsewhere calls "beautiful individuality" (LFA 153, XIII:203). Individuality is for Hegel the logical reconciliation of universality and particularity. A content that is pure universality – God, light – is nearly impossible to sculpt. One that is pure particularity – a bust of an ordinary Athenian – is not worth sculpting. The content approaches individuality as these two sides are balanced against one another. Jesus Christ remains too universal, for a sculpture of him as God is impossible while a sculpture of him as man fails to capture the complex narrative of his rise and fall and rise. But Apollo's divinity outstrips neither the corporeal form of sculpture (his godliness just

64 "[I]t is clear from the determinate character of classical art, where content and form are meant to be adequate to one another, that even on the side of the shape [i.e. the form] there is a demand for totality and independence in itself. This is because the free independence of the whole, in which the fundamental characteristic of classical art consists, implies that each of the two sides, the spiritual content and its external appearance, shall be in itself a totality that is the essential nature of the whole. Only in this way, in other words, is each side implicitly identical with the other" (LFA 433, XIV:20).

65 The human body serves the artist as an "objective foundation" (1823, Ms. 218). Houlgate mentions the difference between sculptural and tragic beauty, though he does not put the point in terms of tragedy's lack of formal beauty ("Hegel on the Beauty of Sculpture" in S. Houlgate, ed., *Hegel and the Arts* [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007], 58).

is his physical perfection⁶⁶) nor its stillness (Apollo's identity is not bound up with any particular story about his life). Individuality, or self-harmonious content, is present as well in the Greek heroes who establish the ethical universal (the norms of Greek life) in the ethically particular (the defeat of this opponent, Hector, in this way). (The difference, meanwhile, is that Achilles' individuality is realized practically, in his epic deeds, while Apollo's is realized contemplatively, in his sculptural self-communion. And this distinction is borne out in Greek art: oddly enough, there are no great sculptures of Achilles.)

We now have before us the account of beauty whose paradigm is the sculpture of the gods: the harmony of a self-harmonious form (lawlike, *Gesetzmässig* shape and pure marble matter) and a self-harmonious content (the realization of the universal god in a particular human body). Liveliness and beauty, to return to the question with which we began, are in the classical era essentially indistinguishable. The very "milieu [*Mitte*]" of Greek culture is one of "free liveliness" (LFA 437, XIV:26), an index of which, Hegel thinks, is that in the case of broken sculptures unearthed in Rome "the whole can be recognized in fragments" (LFA 726, XIV:381).⁶⁷ What merits "universal praise" in Phidias' work is "the expression of self-sufficiency, of self-repose, in these figures, and especially ... their free liveliness ... the way in which the natural material is permeated and conquered by the spirit and in which the artist has softened the marble, animated it, and given it a soul" (LFA 724, XIV:379).⁶⁸ Liveliness refers to a dynamic process of self-differentiation and -resolution. But in classical art, in which

66 In retrospect it is possible to discern in the lofty expressions of these sculptures something like an awareness of the limitations of mere corporeality, a sense of "mourn[ing]" or "sorrow" (LFA 486, XIV:87), but this is only because we have already come to understand the limitations of the classical ideal.

67 This idea was influential on the development of Schlegel's notion of the fragment. (For this point, see Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, trans. P. Barnard and C. Lester [Albany: SUNY Press, 1988].) Hegel is also interested in a related phenomenon from the young science of paleontology. He relates how, for example, Cuvier has become famous for being able to conceive the entire form of an extinct animal from a single fossil (1823, Ms. 50).

68 "What characterizes this [classical] liveliness is the thoroughgoing integration [*Durchbildung*] of the individual points" (1823, Ms. 240). The chief advance of classical over symbolic art is "the concentration of the content in to the clarity of inherently self-conscious individuality which ... achieves expression in the liveliness [*Lebendigkeit*] of the human body that is completely pervaded by the breath of the spirit" (LFA 441, XIV:31). This liveliness is more in evidence, Hegel notes, in High and Late Classical sculpture (fifth and fourth centuries) than in the "Severe" style of the early fifth century (LFA 486, XIV:87).

moments of dissonance are resolved even as they appear, in which the marble we know to be cold and hard seems pliable and alive, a work's liveliness is tantamount to its beauty.

I will mention only briefly the painting of the Italian Renaissance, the second point at which "liveliness" comes to prominence in the history of art. Essentially, painting manages here to approximate the achievements of the classical ideal. Where the sculptor endows the body with the self-possession of the hero's soul, the painter endows a part of that body – the eyes and face – with the self-certain piety of the saint's heart. It is the achievement of the Italians to have managed "such perfect accord between inner and outer, between specific character and its situation" (LFA 868–9, xv:107). In virtue of this thoroughgoing harmony, painting offers us "a living reminder, in th[e] sphere of Christian and romantic art, of art's pure ideal" (LFA 873, xv:112).⁶⁹

Like the hero, the saint leads a life in which she is entirely at home. Such lives obey what Hegel calls "infinite," or completely self-given and self-sufficient purposes. (These purposes are the same self-harmonious content on which the possibility of beauty depends.) As we turn to the post-Reformation era, however, artists become interested in the fact that most people are not saints and that their lives are generally governed by instrumental, externally imposed, "finite" aims. We find ourselves "entangled in the external world, and dependent upon external purposes" (1828, Ms. 68), Hegel says. These external purposes are in the first place those of labor: "The individual man, in order to preserve his individuality, must frequently make himself a means to others" (LFA 149, xiii:197). He is thus no longer a whole, a hero or a saint, but a "fragment."⁷⁰ It is here, under the dispensation of the market, that Hegel says "everything that is called the *prose of life* belongs" (1823, Ms. 68; cf. LFA 148–50, xiii:196–9).⁷¹ It is artistically impossible to invest such subjects with the thoroughgoing harmony of content and form required for beauty because the finitude of everyday

69 What distinguishes the two, naturally, is the attitude taken toward the inner life. Whereas the hero's stately 'self-repose' suggests an interior that is unruffled, even remote, the melancholy self-knowledge of Christ and Mary, their "smiling through tears" (LFA 158, xiii:209), points toward a "bliss [*Seligkeit*]" earned in suffering. (For the contrast of classical *Ruhe* and romantic *Seligkeit*, see LFA 816, xv:40).

70 "To any whole event or action [in the modern world], many individuals contribute, and these individuals appear in the light of their particular activities as fragments" (1823, Ms. 68).

71 For "dependency" and "prose" see LFA 148, xiii:197.

life, its dependence on external forces, is not suited to the “infinite” self-enclosure demanded of the Ideal. The Greek polity was so transparent in its organization that it could itself be called a “work of art.”⁷² From the standpoint of life’s “prose,” however, “the world appears as a mass of finite things” (1823, Ms. 69). This attitude, figured in the *Logic* as the “appearing world” to which the “world-in-itself” is opposed, suggests the thoroughgoing mismatch of concept and reality.⁷³ There is such a thing as practical success in the realm of prose – something like coping. And there is such a thing as reflective reconciliation to the fact that coping is indeed what can be hoped for here. But there is no way, it seems, to present this reconciliation to the eye. It is in response to this circumstance that the genre painter renounces beauty as the principal source of value in art.⁷⁴

This presents an obvious problem for Dutch art, the content of which is none other than life’s prose. But here is where the aforementioned distinction makes a difference. It is true that there is no way to render the prose of life *beautiful*. Beauty, we saw above, requires content that is itself intrinsically harmonious. But *liveliness* makes no such requirement. Human life is staged within the contradiction of self- and other-dependence, Hegel argues, and “liveliness is in this contradiction, and it is the ongoing struggle to overcome this contradiction” (1823, Ms. 69). Genre painting, we will see in a moment, is in particular an art in which this struggle is staged, but it is worth noting that painting is suited to liveliness as such. As against the abstractions of architecture and music, or sculpture’s replete individuals, painting enters into the realm of “particularity.” For this reason, in fact, its “form is properly the form of *liveliness*” (1820, Ms. 193). Whereas the polished marble surfaces of beauty remain permanently unruffled, liveliness appears as the ongoing resolution of the conflict between soul and body. The moment of negativity is thus featured and made intuitable here as a distinct moment of the aesthetic experience. “Since the Idea appears in the field of particularity, it hides the content universally adequate to it; but [this content] presents itself in liveliness as soul” (1820, Ms. 193). Liveliness, in fact, just is “soulfulness – the chief thing in painting” (1820, Ms. 193). In turning to the everyday, this passage

⁷² LPH 250.

⁷³ Cf. SL 505.

⁷⁴ The romantic painter, Hegel notes, “cannot entirely dispense with the ugly” (LFA 864). On the Dutch renunciation of beauty, cf. LFA 882, xv:124.

suggests, painting discovers its true vocation. If it does not eclipse the Christian art of the Renaissance, which manages a beauty reminiscent of the classical age, Dutch art is certainly its peer, eclipsing it in liveliness.

Liveliness as absorption

What we would now like to know is how this sense of soulfulness, or ensouledness, can enter the banality of everyday life. The challenge to the genre painter is to present “the liveliness [*Lebendigkeit*] and joy of a self-sufficient existence that persists, generally, amid the greatest variety of individual aims and interests” (LFA 833, xv:62) – and this is a challenge. For how can there be anything like an Achilles of the stock exchange, a “self-sufficient existence” in the prose of life? Recall that self-sufficiency was a characteristic of beauty: the classical hero presents a sort of manifest and self-constituting excellence that it is the task of the artist simply to *translate* into the mediums of sense. Simply to imagine an Apollo or an Achilles, Hegel thinks, is already to constrain the ways in which he can be presented. The bourgeois protagonist, by contrast, is easily lost in the maze of “finite purposiveness” that constitutes the life of coping in a market society. There is no path one *ought* to follow through this maze, and there is no way the artist ought to present it. For beauty to be possible, we have seen, the content of the work must itself be self-harmonious, a result of which is that its liveliness, or dynamic self-sufficiency, seems to inhere in and spring from the nature of the content itself. But there can also be liveliness without beauty: a case in which the content of the work comes to assume an appearance of self-sufficiency that we would never, at first, have expected from it. The question now is how the Dutch artist can create this appearance of liveliness, can paint what I have called necessity into contingency.

The idea of liveliness as an embodiment of necessity is suggested by a passage in Hotho. In a figurative painting, “the situation is [either] by its nature transient and the feeling expressed in it momentary, so that one and the same individual could express many other similar feelings or even opposite ones, or alternatively, the situation and the feeling pervade the whole soul of the character who therefore manifests in these the fullness of his inmost nature” (LFA 868, xv:105–6). Hegel mentions as examples of the former case paintings in which the Madonna is lent

a sort of generic, all-purpose beauty. Like Achilles or Apollo, Mary's content is self-harmonious: it is her nature to be the human being who, as Christ's own mother, is able to love him most completely. The best painters thus depict the Virgin in those "crises of maternity" – Pietàs, annunciations – that constitute her "eternal situations." But some paintings, Hegel observes somewhat wryly, lend her a beauty that would not be out of place in the "circumstances of *conjugal* love" as well (LFA 868, xv:106). The trouble in such cases is not the heresy of sexualizing Mary but the failure (the reason for which will become clear momentarily) to achieve that appearance of necessity that liveliness and beauty demand. By contrast, Correggio's Magdalene is a "supreme" painting insofar as "we cannot find room for any thought except the one which the situation is meant to arouse" (LFA 868, xv:106).⁷⁵

It turns out that the same demand is made for scenes of daily life. In a particularly helpful passage, one that ties the term *Lebendigkeit* to the notion of visual necessity, we read that "in genuine genre painting the liveliness, even in the case of the most fleeting moments, is too great to leave any room for the idea *that these figures would ever adopt a different position*, other features, and a changed expression" (LFA 869, xv:107).⁷⁶ And this sense of coherence, of a fixity somehow not frozen, is just what the Dutch have achieved. A picture shows "an old woman who threads a needle by lamplight" or "a movement [*Zug*] that a man makes in drinking," but the images are painted in such a way that "something ephemeral is held fast and made stationary." "This is the triumph of art over transience" (1823, Ms. 186), a transience not only of the gestures themselves but of the form of life to which they belong. Again, this ought to be impossible. There is no conceptual structure to smoking, no best way to smoke, no way to show the person smoking as *essentially* a smoker in the way that Mary is *essentially* a mother. There is no question, on the face of it, that the woman threading the needle could be imagined doing any number of different chores or having any number of different feelings and thoughts. (This is what it means to be bourgeois.) But Hegel's claim is that the sense of necessity, of the

75 "In this scene of repentance, one also sees the depths of her soul, her character – and not that this repentance is a merely temporary thing" (1820, Ms. 210).

76 Emphasis mine. Compare Diderot: "A composition must be organized so as to persuade me that it could not be organized otherwise; a figure must act or rest so as to persuade me that it could not do otherwise" (cited in Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988] at 85–6).

living fit between the feeling and the scene, is precisely what “genuine” genre painting can achieve. How?⁷⁷

The answer appears in a passage that has received little commentary. “Man always lives in the immediate present,” Hegel begins, referring to the content of genre paintings; “what he does at every moment is something particular.”⁷⁸ And given this air of contingency, of the insignificance of his projects,

the right thing is simply to see each task through to its conclusion, no matter how trivial – to put one’s heart and soul into it [*mit ganzer Seele dabeizusein*]. In that event, the man is at one with such an individual matter, for which alone he seems to exist, because he has put his whole self and all his energy into it. This intertwining [*Verwachsensein*] of the man and his task produces a harmony of the subject and the particular character of his activity in his nearest circumstances, and *such intertwining is also a form of intimacy* [*Innigkeit*]; it is what draws us to the self-sufficiency of such an explicitly total, rounded, and perfect existence. Thus, the interest we may take in pictures of objects like those mentioned does not lie in the objects themselves but in this soul of liveliness [*Seele der Lebendigkeit*] which . . . speaks to every uncorrupt mind and free heart and is to it an object in which it participates and takes joy. (LFA 833, xv:62)

When Vermeer paints a music lesson, or Hals a merry toper, what matters is not the activity but the quality of the individual’s engagement therein, of her “absorption,” to borrow a term made famous by Michael Fried.⁷⁹

77 Houlgate notes that modern painting must depict objects “as resonating with vitality in themselves” (“Hegel and the Art of Painting,” 71) but offers no account of the nature of this vitality or the means by which it is achieved.

78 Achilles, too, performs particular actions. The difference is that these belong at once to *him* and to his *community* at large. The universal, in other words, is visible – aesthetically present – in the particularity of his actions. Such heroism, of course, is no longer possible.

79 In Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*. Two points may be made here. First, though Fried’s topic is eighteenth-century French rather than seventeenth-century Dutch painting, he notes that in “Vermeer, and, supremely, Rembrandt . . . [absorptive] states and activities are rendered with an intensity and a persuasiveness never subsequently surpassed” (43). When Chardin “located the experience of absorption in the home, or at any rate in absolutely ordinary surroundings,” he was “following Northern precedent” (46). Second, Fried argues that the French concern with the depiction of absorption in painting appears nowhere more strongly than in the writings of Diderot (55–9). Hegel had read the *Essai sur la peinture* in Goethe’s translation (LFA 847, xv:77), and he welcomed Diderot’s influential support, both in theater and in painting, for the modern artist’s attention to everyday life (LFA 597, xv:224). (Diderot preferred “rusticity over prettiness” and declared he “would give

It is by devoting herself to her work, or play, that the modern agent may transcend the means–ends shuffle of everyday life and come to identify not only rationally, as she will after reading the *Phenomenology* and the *Philosophy of Right*, but feelingly, with that life itself. “The joy of being alive, of fidelity, of attentiveness to a task – such situations can indicate a finite, hearty [*tüchtige*] sort of intimacy” (1823, Ms. 239), Hegel writes, returning us in this mention of *Innigkeit* to the central project of romantic painting. To be more precise, what has happened here is that the content of the painting has been reconceived in such a way that it can come to possess the sort of internally structured content we saw in the case of the Virgin Mary. A scene of smoking is not about smoking itself but about everydayness in general, and just as the Virgin has maternal love as her essence, so daily life has commitment, absorption, and hearty pride.⁸⁰ “In many of the scenes painted by the Dutch,” Hegel argues, what is set before us is “a *way* of acting that is more general than [an] action itself” (1820, Ms. 212). A scene of such absorption presents to us the reconciliation of the freely self-determining modern agent to the instrumentality and other-dependence of his everyday affairs. In this arrangement, as in all successful romantic painting, the negative (here, banality) is both acknowledged and overcome.

This account remains incomplete, however. Liveliness is made *possible* by the discovery that a painting’s content can be reconceived as the quality of an agent’s absorption rather than the task he is performing. But if Hegel thought that the quality of concentration itself were sufficient for success, Charlie Brown with his furrowed brow and protruding tongue would be the image of liveliness. The problem, again, lies in the nature of the content. Mary must be portrayed as loving Christ because it is in her nature to do so. The woman threading the needle *can* be portrayed as absorbed in her task, and this absorption goes a long way toward redeeming the triviality of the scene. But, again, *must* she be presented this way? No. Daily life can be enervating and desperate, as in the slack mouths and dead eyes of the café denizens in

ten Watteaus for one Teniers” [cited by Fried at 99].) Given Diderot’s concern with absorption, it is thus quite possible that Hegel’s own interest in this topic derives, via Goethe, from him.

⁸⁰ Interestingly, Christian painting seems also to possess this quality of absorbedness: Correggio’s Magdalene is “unconscious” of her past sins; she is “absorbed [*vertieft*] only in her present situation, and this faith, this sensitiveness, this absorption [*Versinken*] seems to be her entire and real character” (LFA 868, xv:106–7). For more on *Vertiefung*, see the section on the uses of figurative language in chapter 3.

Degas. It is certainly no accident that genre painting reaches its peak in a nation of cheerful, hardworking burghers, and when an artist like Breughel portrays “the liveliness and joviality of the Dutch farmers” (1820, Ms. 193), he is not counterfeiting Boer cheer.⁸¹ Still, the vitality of genre painting is, as noted, only “empirically” justified by Dutch history; Hegel sees he must undertake a deduction “more from the standpoint of the Concept” as well (1820, Ms. 192–3).

The substance of this defense concerns the activity of the genre painter himself, which is importantly different from that of his predecessors. The artist of a religious age is asked to retrieve the beauty that is itself implicit in the structure of the content. Thus the sculptor “does not invent the fundamental type; rather, it is given to him.” The “living form is not invented, but found” (1823, Ms. 218). But invention is precisely what secular art requires. We saw in a passage cited in [chapter 1](#) that the “great modern artist” is the “free spirit” who has “made himself master” over the forms he employs and who thus “ascribes value to them only on the strength of the higher content in the course of his re-creation he puts into them as adequate to them” (LFA 606, xiv:236). The passage offers no clues as to the nature of this higher content, but it suggests that something in the nature of the artist’s own activity is what lends the work its value. This suggestion, which forms the center of the present interpretation of Dutch art, is significantly expanded in an earlier passage. Hegel is responding there to the problem of naturalism in general and of genre painting in particular. As “the imitation of nature enters in [to romantic painting],” he observes, “the difficulty arises of saying what art is.” In such works we find “the entirely prosaic content of daily life, and even if that is presented in the manner of art, are these artworks?” (1826b, Ms. 55). His response appears in Hotho. “[W]e may not deny the name of works of art to the creations of this sphere” if we attend to “the subjective liveliness with which the artist, with his own spirit and heart, comes to completely inhabit [*ganz sich einlebt*] the existence of such [prosaic] topics ... and presents them to our vision in this animation [*Beseelung*]” (LFA 596, xiv:224).⁸²

81 “[W]hatever his subject becomes under his hand, it must not be different from what it is or can in fact be” (LFA 836, xv:66).

82 The final moment of painting’s dialectic is that in which a “subjectivity, this self-reflexive soul, relates itself at the same time [as it opposes itself] to the ungoverned material, the contingent sensuousness. And this subjectivity has its presentation, its external existence, in this contingent material alone; it *shines* therein” (1820, Ms. 186).

In collapsing the real depth of the sculptural form into the illusionistic depth of the picture plane, painting created a possibility of intimacy between the viewer and the representation. Its task was then to realize this intimacy, to lead the viewer toward a recognition of some emotional connection between herself and the pictured subject. Genre painting presents us with scenes so trivial that, though we may recognize them straight away, we seem unable to recognize ourselves in them. The painter can overcome this resistance, can seduce us into sympathy, by shifting our attention from the particularity of the scene at hand to its quality of absorption, of commitment to the form of life at hand. And it is now clear that the painter draws our attention in this direction not only, or even principally, by depicting subjects who are themselves absorbed, but by absorbing *himself* in their lives. The liveliness of the scene is thus “subjective” because it is donated by the artist rather than drawn from the scene itself.⁸³ Rembrandt’s *Night Watch* might have been a static portrait of a band of military men; in a sense, that is all it is. And yet by a thousand painterly sleights – posing the spectator at an angle to the scene, experimenting with light and shadow, making the soldiers walk and talk, and painting the hell out of the whole thing – Rembrandt remakes the local constabulary into a band of national heroes. It is a republican art, Cincinnatus in Amsterdam, and yet the men are precisely of the moment – “modern,” in the sense of the Baudelaire essay cited above.⁸⁴ And yet this is all a terrific illusion, a spell cast by the painter. The men really are just a local militia, one to which Rembrandt, following the passage cited above, ascribes value only on the strength of the higher content – namely, the force and coherence of his own painterly effort – with which he invests the scene (LFA 606, XIV:236).

Just as important here are the notions of *Beseelung* and *Sich-einleben*. The former is associated with the artist’s skill, in particular with facility in coloration. Thanks to “th[e] hither and thither of reflections and sheens of color, th[e] mutability and fluidity of transitions,”

83 “[S]omething new is indeed added to these commonplace subjects, namely the love, the mind and spirit, the soul, with which the artist seizes on them, makes them his own, and so breathes his own inspiration of production as a new life into what he creates” (LFA 837, xv:67). We admire the “liveliness and soul of the ... execution, the mind of the artist which is mirrored in his work” (LFA 804, xv:26).

84 There is none of the period affectation, for instance, of David’s self-consciously “republican” art – e.g. *The Oath of the Horatii*.

Hegel observes, there is “spread over the whole” of the painting “a pure appearance of animation [*Beseelung*]; and this is what constitutes the magic of coloring and is properly due to the spirit of the artist who is the magician” (LFA 848, xv:81). The notion of the artist’s *Sichseinleben* in the work – his self-investment, inhabitation, acclimatization, settling-in – is a trickier notion though perhaps even more important.⁸⁵ Speaking of late romantic naturalism, Hotho’s edition notes that “despite the fidelity of [the] treatment” what matters most is “a reflection of the spirit, because in the manner of their artistic realization [artists] make visible the participation of the spirit, the liveliness [*Lebendigkeit*] of their treatment, the settling-in [*Sichseinleben*] of the mind itself in this ultimate extreme of externality, and, thereby, something inner and ideal” (LFA 794, xv:14). In the case of the artist’s magical *Beseelung*, the picture had seemed to come alive on its own. But *Sichseinleben* suggests something about the painter’s concentration and the quality of his commitment.⁸⁶ By devoting himself to the painting of the scene in question, by giving it his all, the painter performs a sort of attentiveness and interest that suggests it may deserve our own attention in ways we had not expected. He is thus able to “make significant even what is in itself without significance” (LFA 596, xiv:224). The domestic sense of *Sichseinleben* is important here as well. If the painter can somehow “settle in” to the everyday, can make it his own by *remaking* it with his brush, then perhaps so can we.⁸⁷ “The fundamental trait of painting is love,” we saw at the outset of this chapter, and we can now see that genre subjects are no exception. What matters here is the artist’s “way of seeing, his manner of treatment and elaboration, his investment [*Einlebung*] in the

85 “The final achievement of German and Flemish art,” we read, “is its utterly living self-investment [*Sichseinleben*] in the world and its daily life” (LFA 884, xv:127).

86 We can sense, even in “the tiniest and most limited things,” the “undivided concentration of the [painter’s] whole soul” (LFA 886, xv:129).

87 Not surprisingly, the notion of the artist’s “self-investment” is also of central concern in the other modern art: lyric poetry. In Eastern poetry, the heart “invests itself into the soul of things [*lebt es sich ... in die Seele der Dinge hinein*]” (LFA 369, xiii:475). The Eastern lyric, in particular, exhibits the “direct description” that results from an “unreflective investment [*Einlebung*] in [everyday] objects” (LFA 1148; cf. 1149, xv:463–4). The “western, romantic sort of inwardness of the heart [*Innigkeit des Gemüts*] does display a similar self-investment [*Sichseinleben*], though it is on the whole, and especially in the north, rather unhappy, unfree, and wistful” (LFA 369, xiii:475). However, the poetry of objective humor, modeled on the Eastern temper, achieves a “self-investment” that is less fraught (LFA 610, xiv:241).

entirely individual range of his tasks, and the soul and living love of his execution itself" (LFA 836, xv:66).⁸⁸

Given Hegel's pervasive worries about creeping subjectivism in the modern arts and empty displays of skill, it is striking to note here how the Dutch redemption of the everyday not only succeeds despite but is impossible without the freedom and self-reflexive virtuosity of the painter. After all, why does the display of skill itself, one that is in Hegel's view typically empty and self-flattering, serve here to enliven the scene? The lectures do not explore this point, but it seems hard to avoid the resemblance between the subject of the painting, attentively threading her needle or absorbedly smoking his pipe, and the painter himself, utterly invested in his task. If this resemblance is significant, as it seems it must be, we have an element here of that thoroughgoing harmony of the inner and the outer we discussed above. The beautiful art of the classical and Christian eras was made possible by a harmony in the content that was reflected and unfolded in the harmony of content and form. Genre painting cannot be beautiful because its content is flat and, as it were, unstructured. But notice that what arrives to fill its place – the artist's own subjectivity – *is*, as it were, structured or harmonious. One way to read the notion of "subjective liveliness," after all, is to say that there is a liveliness, a dynamic harmony, within the subject himself. This would conceivably be the harmony of the painter with his own act of painting, an invisible analogue of the harmony of the seamstress with her own act of sewing.⁸⁹

There is a relationship as well, perhaps, between the artist and his bourgeois subjects. Genre painting is distinguished in Hegel's view by "the exactitude with which every tiniest individual part is executed" (LFA 812, xv:36) and the sheer "hard work [*Fleiß*]" this requires. Here again the painter's activity mimics his subject's. The Dutch have acquired their freedom only "through hard effort" (LFA 882, xv:124), Hegel observes, "hard struggles and bitter industry [*Fleiß*]" (LFA 597;

88 It is possible that the passages under discussion derive in part from Hotho. (The important term *Sichineleben*, for instance, is probably his. It does not appear in any of the lecture transcripts or in any of Hegel's other works. A term like *Belebung*, meanwhile, is clearly Hegel's; see 1820, Ms. 219; 1826a, Ms. 344.) This is a weakness of my reconstruction. Still, Hegel requires some account of how the absorption of the Dutch citizenry in its common tasks can be presented in its liveliness rather than as mere imitation. And the notion of the painter's parallel investment in the task of painting seems to fit.

89 In this sense, it is possible to speak of "the liveliness and effectiveness [*Wirkung*]" of a purely technical skill (LFA 600, xiv:229).

cf. 598, XIV:225). The meticulousness of Dutch naturalism is thus the formal expression of the Protestant ethic.⁹⁰ Painter and bourgeois citizen are each responding to the common crises of modernity: the citizen must sell his labor for the highest price, regardless of the task; the painter, too, must sell his work, and the growth of portraiture suggests he is less frequently the author of the whole. In each case, Hegel suggests, affirmation and investment offer a way out – or, better, a way in. The seamstress and the smoker can appear at home in their projects not because we have any reason to suspect they will be, but because the artist has simply painted them into the world that they inhabit. Hegel's idea is not so much that the painter makes pictures of people who are themselves absorbed, as in Chardin's *The House of Cards*. It is that he makes pictures of people doing anything whatever, and then paints with such commitment and intensity that his own exemplary self-unity, cousin to the vigorous coherence of the Goethean *freie Geist*, simply forces us to see the painted subject as absorbed, “as if his entire individuality existed for [the] particular business alone” in which he is engaged (1823, Ms. 240).⁹¹ Liveliness is the dynamic unity of soul and body; in bringing this into view, “the correspondence of the portrayed object with *itself*,” the painter literally brings his subject to life, presents “reality explicitly ensouled” (LFA 834, xv:63). The woman sewing by lamplight cannot possess the beauty of the Virgin, but she can rival her vitality.

Comedy and the poor

As I have presented it thus far, the negativity that shades the comfort and cheerfulness of Dutch art is the inherent “repugnance” of the banal. But this is not the genre painter's only theme. In the

90 Greek sculpture exhibits *Fleiß* (1823, Ms. 224; LFA 725, xiv:380), and yet in painting “there is an even greater demand that the industry of elaboration be only a spiritually rich industry [*ist nur ein geistreicher Fleiß*]” (1828, Ms. 129a). The point is that virtuosity alone (the capacity for exactitude) comes to be endowed in Dutch genre with a deeper sense of liveliness.

91 Nonetheless, Fried's comment on Chardin shows how closely he fit the pattern Hegel, perhaps following Diderot, is describing: “For Diderot, as for others among his contemporaries, Chardin's greatness consisted preeminently in his ability to overcome the triviality of his subject matter by virtue of an unprecedented mastery of the means of imitation, an all but miraculous power to evoke the reality of objects, space, and air. (‘If the sublime of technique were not there, Chardin's ideal would be a wretched one’)” (*Absorption and Theatricality*, 74).

1828 lectures, Hegel further develops the limitations of everyday life by turning to the representation of the lower orders of society, the “evil” and the “bad” (1828, Ms. 134a). Though the middle and lower classes both belong to the Third Estate, there is a distinction for Hegel between bourgeois anomie and the malfeasance of the underclass. In the former (“scenes of human life”), our projects appear to us as “purely accidental.” In the latter, however, modern life can appear to us as “base and vulgar” (LFA 832, xv:61).⁹² In its effort to explore and redeem the whole of daily life, genre painting thus “proceeds from the insignificant and accidental to peasant life, even to crudity and vulgarity” (LFA 886, xv:129–30), from assiduous burghers to “refractory characters” (LFA 882, xv:124)⁹³ who come to “quarrels and blows” (LFA 170, XIII:223).

Hegel’s interest in the latter had been sparked by a contemporary Berlin exhibition of recent German genre pictures in which he was dismayed to find the lower classes portrayed as “nothing but . . . snarling and vicious people” (LFA 169, XIII:223). He is interested in contrasting this contemporary German attitude toward the poor with that of the seventeenth-century Dutch. “As they won their freedom, the people of the Netherlands set art in its proper coziness [*Gemütlichkeit*],” Hegel repeats, a coziness that would be disturbed by pictures of the snarling, vicious poor. Accordingly, they invented a solution, a method of treatment that is somehow the very inverse of their treatment of the middle class. “The comical element [*das Komische*] overcomes the badness [*das Schlimme*] of the situation,” Hegel says. “Wickedness [*Das Böse*] is presented *only momentarily, not as a trait of the individual’s being*” (1828, Ms. 134; my emphasis). The genre painter, we have seen, is concerned to overcome the fleetingness of the ordinary moment, and thus to paint the subject “as if his entire individuality existed for [some] particular business alone.” In portraying the comic rogue, however, the Dutch painter does just the opposite: “In the Dutch painters the comical aspect of the situation cancels what is bad in it, and it is at once clear to us that the characters can still be something different from what they are as they confront us in this moment” (LFA 887, xv:130). Hegel

92 On the alienation of the poor with respect to works of art, see also the fifth of Schiller’s *Letters on Aesthetic Education*.

93 Here the contrast between northern and southern Christian painting repeats itself. Italian genre painting tends not to “reveal physical agony, nor are the traits of stubbornness, crudity, and ruggedness, or those of trivial and vulgar people, visible in the character of the faces and bodily forms” (LFA 873, xv:113).

has just begun to develop the observation and he does not offer an account here of how painterly technique is made in one case to fix the scene and in the other to dissolve it. Instead, he captures the difference in dramatic terms: one paints the lower classes *comically*.

The Old Attic comedy of Aristophanes follows the same principle as the Dutch. In his idiosyncratic pursuit of a trivial end, the comic hero's ambitions are brought to grief. The comic agent, however, has a sense of his own idiosyncrasy; for this reason, he is "in his earnestness not actually earnest" (1823, Ms. 287). Like the rogue of genre scenes, his aim is not a "trait of his being," and it is by coming to recognize this that the failure of his project can be laughed off or at least borne with equanimity.⁹⁴ This equanimity is the hallmark of cheerfulness: "the comical ... implies an infinite light-heartedness and confidence felt by someone raised altogether above his own inner contradiction and not bitter or miserable at all; this is the bliss and ease of a man who, being sure of himself, can bear the frustration of his aims" (LFA 1200, xv:528).⁹⁵ The Dutch solution is to imagine the interruptions of the poor and base as a sort of roguish lapse from decency and *Fleiß*, and Hegel's object in the 1828 lectures is to contrast what he sees as an essentially *comical* attitude, forgiving of weaknesses, with the essentially *satirical*, censorious program of his German contemporaries.

By way of contrast, consider A.W. Schlegel's comments on the Dutch. Genre painting succeeds, Schlegel argues, when artists "show the highest mastery in the treatment, either through a ready cheekiness or a tidy elaborateness."⁹⁶ The "danger" in genre painting, meanwhile, is that the painter's "intimate [*vertraulich*] observation" of the world may lead him to take "a pleasure in [the objects he paints] independent of the meaning." This meaning can only be, for Schlegel, the drollery, the "piquan[cy]," of the "common and base" subjects he depicts. But

94 We find comedy "in a situation where petty and futile aims are to be brought about with a show of great seriousness and elaborate preparations but where, precisely because what the individual willed was something inherently trivial, he is not ruined in fact when his purpose fails but can surmount this disaster with cheerfulness undisturbed" (LFA 1201, xv:529). ("The risible element in genuine *comedies* ... essentially consists in the immediate conversion of an intrinsically worthless end into its opposite" [PM §401Z].)

95 Appropriately, "[t]he comical ... plays its part more in the lower class of the real and present world" (LFA 1220-1, xv:553). Hegel is no democrat; and yet he admires in the Dutch treatment of the poor a sort of whimsical populism almost American in spirit.

96 *Vorlesungen*, I, 236. The citation applies to all the quotations in this paragraph.

Schlegel collapses here the two categories, “common and base,” that Hegel seeks to keep distinct and that permit him the crucial distinction between the painter’s identification with his subjects (his attempt to present their lives as something animated and self-governing) and his playful dismissal of their weaknesses. Schlegel sees the proximity of artist and subject – the Dutch “could easily have appeared in their own pictures, especially when they sought to be roguish and lewd” – but he rejects the mechanism of identification and self-investment that forms the heart of Hegel’s account. And this is because Schlegel does not make the connection between the artist’s virtuosity and the meaning of the work. For him, genre painting is, in the end, a laugh at the lower classes’ expense: a “*bambocciata*,” a bit of “joking.” By contrast, Hegel’s effort to explain why it is that dazzling technical effects emerged in the Netherlands at the same time that the content of painting took a radical turn from the traditional subjects of history painting is inventive and quite sophisticated.

And yet given the sorts of critical claims yielded by this account, we are likely today to charge Hegel with the sort of fusty conservatism and fixation on domesticity to which Henrich refers as Hegel’s “Biedermeier” taste.⁹⁷ Not only is “coziness” the great achievement of Dutch painting, but the depiction of social and class distress is successful only when it refuses to take them seriously. The point is one of principle, of course, not taste. And it may seem here that the principle in question – the sort of high-altitude philosophical account of modernity as necessarily reconciled and free – is dictating in a rather small-minded manner to a theory of the arts. Hegel puts the point quite clearly: “When ... in modern pictures a painter tries to be piquant in the same way [as the Dutch],” Hegel argues, “what he usually presents to us is something inherently vulgar, bad, and evil without any reconciling comicality. For example, a bad wife scolds her drunken husband in a tavern and really snarls at him; but then there is nothing to see, as I have said once before, except that he is a dissolute chap and his wife a driveling old woman” (LFA 887, xv:130). Hegel wants a sort of Dickensian redemption of the poor, but the work of his contemporaries stares back with the flat naturalism of Zola.

97 For a useful sketch of the notion of the Biedermeier period in lyric poetry, see Jane K. Brown, “In the Beginning Was Poetry” in James Parsons, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Lied* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 24–31.

I will return to the comic or sentimental treatment of the poor, but consider for the moment the charge of Biedermeier conservatism. It is important to remember that the painting of daily tasks and activities can arrive at coziness only once it has begun with a sense of “repugnance” at the triviality and dependency of our careers and daily tasks. This repugnance returns us to that current of worry we saw surface in Hegel’s review essay on Solger, for it is just this disaffection that had led the Romantic generation to cling to hopes of a golden age. The point here is simply that if Hegel rejects the art and politics of longing, he does so not from a failure to register their concerns, but from a refusal to stop at them. Hegel is quite open about the fact that in modernity, what Schelling called the differentiated age, neither true individuality nor true community are possible. “Even the great actions and events in which a community cooperates are ... confessedly only a manifold of individual efforts,” Hegel says. And yet these individuals fail just as much to grasp the whole: “This or that man makes his own contribution with this or that aim in view ... and at the end, in fortunate circumstances, something is accomplished which, compared with the whole, is of a very subordinate kind. What most men execute is, in this connection, compared with the greatness of the whole event and the total aim to which they make their contribution, only a trifle” (LFA 149, XIII:198). The passage is remarkably similar to the conclusion of the *Phenomenology*’s famous Preface: “the share in the total work of Spirit which falls to the individual,” Hegel writes there, “can only be very small,” and “the individual must all the more forget himself, as the nature of science implies and requires.”⁹⁸ Modern man must come to take his place among the latecomers and last men. Given the fact that Hegel’s triumphalism can earn him a summary dismissal from readers today, it is worth emphasizing here his acknowledgement of the problem.

Acknowledgement of negativity, I suggested in [chapter 1](#), is the characteristic feature of that third phase of romantic art that took as its subject neither the beautiful (an evasion of the negative) nor the ugly (an obsession with it) but the banal. And yet we might still wonder here, in spite of this work of acknowledgement, why Hegel’s interest in post-Reformation painting, centering almost entirely on scenes of domestic life, is so particularly narrow. On an uncharitable reading, after all, Hegel might be said in his work on Dutch painting

to have taken rather too literally the well-known figure of “being-at-home,” that favorite and vaguely Heideggerian metaphor of his for achieved human freedom.⁹⁹ If modernity demands that we see ourselves at home in our world, in other words, let’s have more pictures of – being at home. Hegel’s system has probably been called at one time or another a philosophy of domesticity as such. But the reply here is that the narrowness of post-Reformation painting’s focus is simply art’s own narrowness. Hegel has not here forgotten the tragedies and complexities of substantive ethical conflicts, or what Bernstein, referring to the struggle of ironist and moralist in Chapter 6 of the *Phenomenology*, has called “non-routine, significant human action.”¹⁰⁰ But the resolution of such complexity has been referred away from individual agents, away from Faust and Karl Moor, and toward the institutions that organize modern social life. And if our norms reside in office buildings not individuals, Hegel thinks, then there can be no great ethical art in modernity, no epic of bureaucracy, no drama staged in family court. The opacity of these institutions to the “sensuous shining” of the artwork is a disappointment (and eventually, in Josef K, a crisis), but Hegel is perfectly willing, I have argued, to recognize the “partiality” of modern art, its inability to address the broad reach of our concerns. What is left to artists is what is left out of institutions: the small chores, the family strife, the bootless careers, the unrequited loves. Here, too, we can be stubborn and one-sided. But this is not the deep one-sidedness of the ironist or the moralist. It is the frivolous, slightly neurotic one-sidedness of the Aristophanic hero, of Homer Simpson and Jerry Seinfeld and David Brent. The overcoming of our lesser evils (boorishness, selfishness, vanity) does not call for law courts or agencies. It is possible for the modern artist to show us how, with a bit of wit and a willingness to laugh, we can manage to overcome our one-sidedness. But, again, Hegel does not consider this solution droll or light or easily earned. The Dutch genre painters were as radical in his view as the modernists remain in ours, for they looked at the canons of academicism – the supremacy of history

99 Versions of this phrase occur across his oeuvre, but are particularly common in the lectures on art and on religion. Its one appearance in the *Phenomenology* comes in a discussion of Greek tragedy in the final paragraph of the section on *Kunstreligion* (PhS §747).

100 J.M. Bernstein, “Confession and Forgiveness: Hegel’s Poetics of Action” in R.T. Eldridge, ed., *Beyond Representation: Philosophy and Poetic Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 36.

painting and the demand for the bold, clear compositions of Poussin – and shrugged. No group of artists in the history of the romantic era had ever dared to offer their audiences as a subject for serious consideration the threading of a needle or the lighting of a pipe. But what is so remarkable about Dutch painting, Hegel thinks, is the fact that the banality of the subject is presented not as an obstacle to be struggled against and overcome but as a moment of negativity that is itself already and immediately resolved. The essence of Dutch *Lebendigkeit*, of the dynamic self-differentiation and -resolution of its form of life, is that the triviality of the subject is no sooner registered and found repugnant than it dissolves, for the viewer, amid that general *Schein* of animation (*Beseelung*) lent it by the painter himself. This is the conceptual structure, as it were, of coziness: the consciousness of a comfort (warm fire, snug bed) in the midst of and made possible by its opposite (darkness, winter wind).

Finally, what can be said in defense of Hegel's views on German genre painting? In the scene at the tavern, Hegel remarked, "there is nothing to see . . . except that [the man] is a dissolute chap and his wife a driveling old woman" (LFA 887, xv:130). But why does seeing this amount to seeing nothing? Is Hegel denying that such lives are possible, indeed common, in modernity? No. But the mere existence of such lives tells us nothing interesting or meaningful about our world. This is certainly a strict position. But it derives from Hegel's estimation of the great importance of art, of its ability to satisfy our "higher interests." The naturalism of the German genre painters need not be taken to suggest a mere display of technique or a slavish imitation of a given scene. Instead, the painter is probably aiming at something like the portrait of a class, or *Stand*. But what is the point here? What higher interest is being satisfied? Perhaps a journalistic or sociological interest, but in that case we are dealing with an illustration that does not manage the "freedom" of true art. What Hegel admires in the Dutch is their ability to show us "what man is as man, what the human spirit and character is, what man and *this* man is" (LFA 887, xv:130–1). And that means: freely self-determining. The German genre paintings are "accurate" (there are those who live like this) but they are not "true." There cannot be an art of great individuals, but neither can there be one of individual failures. Spirit's freedom has realized itself not in particular men, but in humanity as such. And in Hegel's remarkably demanding view, every painting is at once of "man and *this* man." Every portrait, or every great one, is an image of humanity itself.

After genre

Next to the glories of the Italian Renaissance, an art whose beauty and piety poises it between the classical ideal and late romantic modernity, Dutch genre painting forms a sort of highpoint, both conceptually and historically. It is in virtue of their lack of liveliness, recall, that Hegel suggested the modern arts had lost for us their essential interest (1826b, Ms. 3a). In genre painting, and Dutch genre painting in particular, liveliness reaches a peak. The formal structure of the art of painting involves a tension between the central, sculptural figure that unifies the work (and with whom, in Christian painting, we feel an emotional intimacy) and the particularity of the background that threatens to distract our attention (as does the mirror, say, in Van Eyck's *Arnolfini Wedding*). In fact, Hegel considers this opposition "advantageous" for painting (1823, Ms. 235), and if we recall the sense of liveliness as a "constant process" of "positing contradiction in itself, enduring it, and overcoming it" (LFA 120, XIII:162), we can perhaps see why. On the one hand, the Dutch pursuit of naturalistic detail explodes the content of painting (and paintings), threatening to dissolve the bonds of intimacy into a catalogue of miniatures and portraits. But the Dutch have also pursued the study of color and light and have made possible new strategies of integrating and harmonizing the frame (the *Beseelung* mentioned above).¹⁰¹ The greater the tensions the painter faces between representation and expression, the particular and the universal, the greater the reconciliation he may effect. Italian painting is more beautiful, but the sharpened contrasts of the Dutch tradition lend it greater *Lebendigkeit*.¹⁰²

The painting of everydayness assumes two subsidiary forms: still life and portraiture. Like religious paintings, portraits are constrained by the personalities of their subjects.¹⁰³ The constraint is loose, however,

101 For the "peace and reconciliation" communicated by color harmony, see LFA 844, xv:75. Color is "in the first instance, liveliness [*Lebendigkeit*]; [it is] no mere coloring [*Kolorieren*]" (1823, Ms. 242).

102 Dutch art attains "the greatest liveliness of conception and the greatest individuality in the mode of execution" (LFA 871, xv:110). In their "supreme skill" and in "the liveliness [they have] achieved," modern painters even seem to surpass their classical and Renaissance peers (LFA 813, xv:37). Italian painting invests human *expression* with liveliness – the hands and face. Dutch painting extends the scope of this liveliness to cover the entire scene (1826a, Ms. 344).

103 The portraitist is responsible, after all, for "bring[ing] the special character of the individual before our eyes" (LFA 866, xv:103).

since we can take an interest in portraits of people we do not know, and in the great portraits we can enjoy something universal,¹⁰⁴ and at times distinctly modern.¹⁰⁵ In playing the character of a particular individual off of his more general humanity, a “deepening” of painting’s “inner liveliness” is achieved (LFA 866, xv:103). But portraiture is too limited a field, and too much governed by market constraints – “commissions” (LFA 606, xiv:236) – to make a serious mark. While portraiture involves a serious investment in the subject, and a valuable constraint on the painter, still life tends in the opposite direction.¹⁰⁶ By radicalizing the triviality of the content taken up in genre painting, its meaning collapses wholly into the subjectivity of the artist – the “magic of seeming ... comprises the chief interest” (1820, Ms. 196) – and figures as the end of painting’s line of development in much the same way that the humorous novel represents a collapse of modern literature.

Hegel was broadly disappointed with the painting of his contemporaries, and there is no evidence to suggest that he expected a renaissance of the Dutch achievement in the halls of Dresden or Berlin. After the triumphs of the early seventeenth century, the excesses of the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries (Baroque to Rococo) initiate a steady “decline” in the art and power of painting. The Rococo tendency toward “grace and mildness” (1823, Ms. 245) lapses into the pursuit of what is merely “pleasing,”¹⁰⁷ while the fashion for allegory is, as ever, “vague, uninteresting, and cold” (LFA 859, xv:95). The devolution of responsibility upon the individual artist implies as well a

104 “[T]he painter must express the universal situation of the spirit in the portrait’s lines [*Züge*]” (1820, Ms. 210). For Titian’s and Dürer’s great portraits, see 1820, Ms. 246.

105 In a fragment from 1820, Hegel observes of the portraits of Dürer and Holbein that “the gaze, especially the region around the mouth ... reflects [*spiegelt*] modern reflectiveness [*Reflexion*], spiritual activity, feeling, [the state of] having thought much and said much, etc.” (“Über von Kügelgens Bilder [1820],” xi:563).

106 From its “higher, nobler” achievements (which Hegel here associates with the work of Van Dyck) the tradition of Dutch painting “moves on to portraits, the presentation of domestic scenes, products of the imagination, or of life’s most commonly occurring moments, and finally to still life, to the assemblage of various [kinds of] equipment, tools, animals, fruits, etc.” (1820, Ms. 192).

107 The argument here centers on the palette favored by modern painters. What makes the Dutch superior colorists has to do not with naturalism but with liveliness – i.e. with the degree of dynamic opposition for which their use of “pure” (i.e. primary) colors allows (1820, Ms. 37). By contrast, Hegel notes, “one always sees in the pictures of the last 30–40 years colors that are mixed and muted, since these do not distinguish themselves so definitely from one another and are thus more easily brought

waxing risk of mannerism (“*Manieren*”) in composition and execution, and though an artist’s peculiarity of style can be a vital element of his work – a “way of looking”¹⁰⁸ – it can also substitute for true creativity when geared toward the production of mere “effects.” On the one hand, Hegel has in mind here the play of “strong lights and shadows” characteristic of the Baroque (1823, Ms. 245; LFA 841, xv:72). It is worth noting that this play destroys, rather than furthers, Dutch *Lebendigkeit*, presumably because a painter like Caravaggio introduces, but does not unify or reconcile, the powerful contrasts between darkness and light. It is possible to see something prudish in this dismissal, as if Hegel were unsettled by the sense of raw psychic and sexual conflict present in Caravaggio’s work. But it is also possible to read him as rejecting something like the self-consciousness, the “theatricality,” to borrow the term Fried opposes to the achievement of “absorption,” in the Baroque.¹⁰⁹ Hegel was probably not familiar with Caravaggio and remarks in this direction are speculative.¹¹⁰ He did know the work of Caspar David Friedrich, however, whom he points to in the first series of lectures as a pursuer of just such effects: in particular, of “a severity of style so produced [*gemacht*]” that it mounts to “affectation” (1820, Ms. 140). The reference to severity suggests a picture like *The Monk by the Sea* (on which Kleist wrote his famous review); meanwhile, the dramatically turned back of the *Wanderer above the Mist* suggests a certain theatricality, an estrangement of the spectator from the scene, which seems already to contain a spectator, and thus a disruptive and ultimately insubstantial pursuit of surprise.¹¹¹ Art is the presentation of reconciled opposites; painting effects this presentation as a sort of “intimacy” between the viewer and the represented subject; such intimacy requires an investment of imagination in the scene that it is much easier to disrupt than

into harmony” (1823, Ms. 63). Such mixed colors – “green, violet” – are “pleasing [*angenehm*]” insofar as “they affect our eyes neither too strongly nor too weakly” (1820, Ms. 36).

108 Idiosyncrasies are inevitable in painting, for “every master has ... his style” (1823, Ms. 235; cf. LFA 292, XIII:377) – in particular, his sense of color. But a sense of color – “a way of looking at and conceiving tones of color as they really exist” – is something that can be shared, and artistic idiosyncrasy can thus transcend “mere caprice” (LFA 849, xv:82).

109 See note 79, above.

110 For a useful summary of paintings Hegel did know, see the long footnote in Houlgate, “Hegel and the Art of Painting,” 77n9.

111 Fried’s brief comments on Friedrich suggest a more sympathetic view than Hegel’s (*Absorption and Theatricality*, 104n). Nor does he consider Caravaggio a theatrical painter, by the way. I am borrowing his categories rather loosely.

it is to sustain. (Hegel thinks that some of these interruptions *can* be valuable, however; more on this in the next section.)

There is no reason to think that in the wake of the Baroque, the Rococo, and the mannerism of Friedrich, Hegel has given up on the art itself. Modern painting, “owing to a freshening of interest in the older Italian and German painting, as well as in the later Dutch school, has at least made an attempt to acquire livelier forms and a fuller content” (LFA 161, XIII:213).¹¹² This does not mean that Hegel calls for a mere recapitulation: the rediscovery of old masters has in some cases steered artists down the “wrong road” insofar as it “has induced [them] to deny a further development in the mode of treatment and portrayal (LFA 875, XV:115).¹¹³ True, no such modes have yet made their mark on contemporary painting. But there is no reason to think these impossible, as the century following Hegel’s death will make clear, and there is no reason to think that Hegel’s praise of the Dutch requires him to count the retrogressive ambitions of a Norman Rockwell as a serious form of art.¹¹⁴

The task of the late romantic arts is “to see the present itself as it is – even at the cost of sacrificing beauty and ideality of content and appearance – as a present liveliness recreated by art” (LFA 574, XIV:196). And the crude fact is that the concerns of the twentieth century were, though not discontinuous with those of the nineteenth (a point in Hegel’s favor), at least substantially different in emphasis. At the risk of contrivance, one way to see this is to consider the facts of war, poverty, and divorce – the elements of modern life Hegel presents in the *Philosophy of Right* as ongoing and intractable sources of alienation and pain.¹¹⁵ The disappointments of love, divorce presumably included,

112 This is more sanguine, at any rate, than A.W. Schlegel’s 1802 opinion: “If here and there we speak correctly of progress [in the art of modern painting], this is only in relation to a yet more miserable degradation. In France, for instance, they no longer paint in such a mannered style as they did thirty or fifty years ago. One studies the ancients and the old masters and expresses this study more or less in his own pictures: it is still a long way from here to truly original creation” (*Vorlesungen*, II, 41).

113 “[I]n recent times the principle of the imitation of nature, and of naturalism generally, has raised its head again in order to bring back to the vigour and distinctiveness of nature an art which had relapsed into feebleness and nebulousity; or, on the other hand, to assert the regular, immediate and explicitly fixed sequences of nature against the manufactured and purely arbitrary conventionalism, really just as inartistic as unnatural, into which art had strayed” (LFA 45, XIII:70).

114 The question of whether Hegel would (have to) admire Rockwell comes from Robert Pippin.

115 On this trio see Michael O. Hardimon, *Hegel’s Social Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), chapter 7.

are the domain of lyric, as we will see in [chapter 4](#). The challenge to our cheerfulness presented by the fact of poverty and a permanent underclass is taken up in one way, as we have seen, by the comic forgiveness of the Dutch genre painter.¹¹⁶ But how can art reconcile us to war? Of the three topics, this is perhaps the one that has occasioned the greatest art. But the possibilities of self-realization in war once possible in the *Iliad* are no longer available in *Wallenstein*; and though a modern war (the Napoleonic campaigns) features, significantly, in Goethe's *Hermann und Dorothea*, it is present only as a rumble in the background. We can certainly be reconciled to war, in this case, if it fails to come on stage. In the twentieth century, of course, wars had gotten bad enough that even when artists kept them, as they often did, offstage, they registered concussive effects.¹¹⁷ Because Hegel acknowledged the permanence and evil of war, and because he saw the task of modern art as that of reconciling us to such remainders, it is possible, if somewhat crude, to imagine a Hegelian *rapprochement* with the avant-garde movements, the modernisms and postmodernisms, that grew from each of the two World Wars. And it is hard to imagine he would consider the Biedermeier art of Norman Rockwell an engagement with and not an evasion of the world he lived in.

If Hegel's conception of genre painting has an afterlife, it is most likely in photography, where the magical skill of, say, Cartier-Bresson can again mystify and enliven, hold still without freezing, the contingency of a street scene. But Hegel's account of painting as involving, on the one hand, an ever wider circumference of representation, and thus an ever less likely and more repugnant choice of subject matter, and on the other hand time a steady growth in the range and subtlety of technique, has enormous relevance for modern literature, in which the tension between the triviality of bourgeois life and the (perhaps redemptive, perhaps ironic) brilliance of the writer's style reaches a very sharp pitch. To late romantic art in general belong "bad, unethical objects that comprise the content and to which art gives a beautiful form" (1826b, Ms. 55). We will consider Hegel's own version of this literary project in the "true humor" of Sterne and Hippel. But it is also Flaubert's project in *Madame Bovary*, the book about nothing, the book

116 The Spanish as well. Cf. Murillo's picture displaying the Olympian dignity of two beggar children (LFA 170, XIII:224).

117 In, for instance, *The Sun Also Rises*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, *As I Lay Dying*, etc.

whose author had shown, in the words of Baudelaire, that “all subjects are indifferently good or bad depending on the treatment they receive,”¹¹⁸ and a project that animates the entire post-Flaubertian line from Chekhov to Joyce to Nabokov. These writers will not offer the sort of complexly immediate reconciliation present in Dutch painting. When the young Joyce writes to his publisher of the “special odour of corruption” he has made to “floa[t] over” the middle-class agonies of *Dubliners*, he is reprising a Flaubertian scorn.¹¹⁹ And yet the brilliance of the style is never uncoupled, as it is in the humorous novels Hegel dismisses as non-art, from the matter at hand. The structure of the “epiphany” within the everyday for which *Dubliners* is so famous involves an appropriation of religious language that is by no means ironic. The question we can imagine Hegel asking these writers, or their readers, is whether the brilliance of the style involves the writer in something like the self-investment in, the commitment to, the world he so brilliantly presents – a world that obsessed Joyce, for instance, both despite and in virtue of his self-imposed exile.

Painting spontaneity

The skill and technical inventiveness of the painter play two importantly different roles in Hegel’s account of Dutch art. On the one hand, the artist’s technique allows him to endow the whole of the picture with that sense of animation, or *Beseelung*, in virtue of which the subjects depicted come to seem one with their tasks. But the refinement of technique can also be considered in its own right, Hegel thinks, independently of the representation of daily life. For Gethmann-Siefert, the significance of this refinement is that it brings the course of painting to a *Vollendung*, a perfection and an end, in the formal beauty of its colors. Still, the “pleasures” such perfection affords, and to which she appeals as its aim, are not sufficiently serious to explain the genre painter’s increasing fascination with technique.¹²⁰ For one, Hegel

118 Cited in Frederick Brown, *Flaubert* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2006), 332.

119 From a letter of October 1905. Flaubert occasionally signed his letters “Bourgeoisophobus.”

120 Gethmann-Siefert speaks of the “formally perfected exhaustion of the means of painting in the musicality of color” (“Hegel über Kunst und Alltäglichkeit,” 263; cf. 248). The interest in formal beauty, she notes, also characterizes the achievements of Mozart and Rossini in opera (cf. “Schöne Kunst und Prosa des Lebens,” 129–31). Gethmann-Siefert presents her readings of opera and genre paintings as instances of a broader

thinks the exploration of color is as much a creative, open-ended activity as it is the solution to a discrete set of formal problems.¹²¹ Even more importantly, he finds in the achievements of Dutch experimentation with technique a remarkable possibility of self-knowledge and an experience, one-sided but significant, of freedom.

To orient our approach to this point consider Hegel's discussion of "the universal and absolute need from which art, on its formal side, springs" (LFA 31, XIII:50). The need for art as such is the need for the embodiment of reconciling points of view on matters of shared concern. To consider this need on its formal side is to abstract from the idea of communication, from the content of the work, and to view it more primitively as an expressive act, a making-objective of something within. (Hegel speaks of the "rational need to lift the inner and outer world into [man's] spiritual consciousness as an object in which he recognizes again his own self.") This formal dimension of human self-recognition in works of art can in turn be considered, he thinks, "practically" (as an *act* of recognition) or "contemplatively [*theoretisch*]" (as an act of *recognition*) (LFA 31, XIII:51). We will consider the former, the artist's assertion of his own freedom, in our discussion of virtuosity in the next chapter. For the moment, we turn to the latter, to the way in which the form of a work of art, and a Dutch painting in particular, permits a surprising discovery – or, better, a familiar discovery in a surprising context – about the nature of the mind.

On its own, the discussion of this theoretical need in Hotho is hard to make out: "in general man must see himself, represent himself to himself, fix before himself what thinking finds as his essence, and recognize himself alone alike in what is summoned out of himself and in what is accepted from without" (LFA 31, XIII:51). The notion that we need to represent ourselves to ourselves is too broad to give us much of a purchase on the passage, but the final idea, that what is at stake in art is in some sense an appreciation of our own spontaneity, of the fact

"rehabilitation of aesthetic pleasure" she believes Hegel to have undertaken. Hegel was certainly not one to leave this dimension, or moment, out of an account of art's value. Still, the pleasures of formal beauty belong in his view to the sphere of "natural beauty" – i.e. to the intimations of purposiveness discussed by Kant – and Hegel accords this relatively little weight in his broader theory of value in art.

121 In particular, it is essential to the development of a personal style – "Coloration [*das Kolorit*] is the characteristic property of each master – a moment of the artist's productive imagination [i.e. creativity]" (1823, Ms. 243). Because such styles necessarily differ from one another, it is hard to see at first how this pursuit brings painting to an "end."

that we should recognize “ourselves alone” even in “what is accepted from without,” is concrete and strikingly original. In the lecture transcripts, the point comes across more clearly: “The abstractly universal satisfaction of art is that man makes appearance as such intelligible [*vorstellig*]” (1828, Ms. 129a). “It is a general concern of art to grasp the breath of seeming [*Hauch des Scheinens*] and bring it to presentation . . . The height of skill exists where art brings itself to appearance” (1820, Ms. 129).¹²² What would it mean for appearance itself to become intelligible, for *Scheinen* to be not the means but itself the object of presentation? The idea seems to be that works of art can in some sense teach us about the mechanisms of experience itself.¹²³ Visual experience is the case Hegel seems to have in mind here, for although “*Scheinen*” is his term for artistic appearance in general, it is in painting that it comes into view. The Dutch have in their formal experimentation brought to light “all the secrets of th[e] ever more profound seeming [*Scheinen*] of external realities” (LFA 598, xiv:227).¹²⁴ Two such secrets are singled out for discussion.

The first concerns the differential, or “musical,” nature of color perception. “In music, a note is valid only in its relationship to another,” Hegel observes; “the same is true of the Dutch school” (1820, Ms. 129). At close range, a passage of painting or of melody can appear utterly unorganized – a jumble of colored flecks. At a distance, hues and contours, like chords and harmonies, “magically” emerge.¹²⁵ A second surprising discovery is color’s role in the perception of depth: “the way that objects appear in the foreground or the background” is a matter not only of spatial perspective, but of “the play of color’s appearance,”

122 “Painting, on account of its interiority, is the art of seeming in general, and it arouses an interest in this seeming” (1826, Ms. 341).

123 Gethmann-Siefert calls this the “subjective positing of appearance” (“Hegel über Kunst und Alltäglichkeit,” 247) and sees correctly that it entails “a reflexivity, so to speak, of sensuousness itself” (“Schöne Kunst und Prosa des Lebens,” 137). She construes this reflexivity, however, as the viewer’s awareness of the content of the picture (i.e. everydayness) rather than of the processes of perception.

124 For a useful discussion of *Schein* – essentially, the painter’s subtraction (and idealization) of the third dimension – see Houlgate, “Hegel and the Art of Painting.” In ignoring the constitutive importance of the ‘frame,’ discussed above, Houlgate overstates the importance of illusion to the art of painting.

125 The “glisten and gleam” of metal is the product of “juxtaposition alone” (LFA 600, xiv:228). Hegel’s use of the term “magic” in this context has a precedent in Diderot’s writings (cited in Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality* at 87, 115, 122). More proximally, Tieck and Wackenroder speak of “the magical lighting effects of Correggio” (cited in Schelling, *Philosophy of Art*, 307n29).

he observes, or what is now known as atmospheric perspective. The discovery that blues recede while reds advance is “something which art alone brings to our awareness” (LFA 836, xv:66). The mechanism of vision “is indeed unconscious,” Hegel allows, “and yet it *ought* to come to consciousness” (1820, Ms. 195). We now know how it does so: in the Dutch decomposition of color into a pointillist array and in their mastery of atmospheric perspective. But why *ought* we become aware of this? Hegel does not develop the point clearly enough in any single passage. But taking the indications from the lecture transcripts in the light of Hotho’s claim that art satisfies a person’s need to see “himself alone” not only in what is “summoned out of himself” but in “what is accepted from without,” in the perceptual given, we can appreciate the significance of the two Dutch discoveries in terms of a post-Kantian theory of mind.

What the conquest of illusion in northern painting brings into view, in other words, is the very fact that vision is a *result*, the active achievement of the mind. What appears a single color at a distance is, on closer inspection, a variety of flecks, a Kantian “manifold,” and the painter’s “magic of appearance” is none other than the mind’s spontaneity. A century before the Transcendental Aesthetic, in other words, genre painters had discovered the self-constituting quality of experience.¹²⁶ (Their skill “display[s] by its own efforts its ability by its own efforts to generate an objective world” [LFA 600, xiv:229].) This is the reflexivity – the contribution to our theoretical self-understanding – that modern painting affords.¹²⁷ It is also a moment of striking originality and open-mindedness in Hegel’s account of painting, and a rare case in which he relaxes and expands his otherwise strictly observed account of value in art. The “formal” need for art – here, the theoretical, and, in the next chapter, the practical – yields quite surprising results.

126 In his first *Critique*, Kant had subjected the empiricist conception of experience to a sustained attack. Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, which will generalize the constructivist account of perception to all forms of knowledge and experience, opens with a complementary salvo at the notion of “sense-data.” Pippin makes some suggestive comments in this direction in “What Was Abstract Art?”, *Critical Inquiry*, 29 (2002) from a broadly Hegelian standpoint, but he doesn’t address the passages I have cited from the *Aesthetics* in which Hegel reports on the actual discovery of spontaneity in Dutch painting.

127 The self-consciousness Hegel attributes to Dutch painting is quite different from the sort famously attributed by Clement Greenberg to the achievements of the abstract expressionists. From Cézanne to cubism to the New York school, Greenberg argued, painting became aware of *painting’s* own nature. In Dutch art, however, it is the nature not of painting but of seeing that comes acutely into view.

Abstract art

Talk of the artist's activity independent of the content of her work inevitably invites the risk of a reversion to pure subjectivity and the ironization, in Hegel's view, of the ethically substantial. As painting becomes increasingly "musical," he warns, "skill appears purely subjective," and when the artist becomes aware of this subjectivity, he grows self-conscious and "no longer produces a work of art" (1820, Ms. 129).¹²⁸ Importantly, however, the exploration of the medium need not end this way: painterly skill is elevated in post-Reformation art to "an objective matter" (LFA 599, XIV:228), thanks in part to its revelation of the "objective" spontaneity of the eye. Hegel remains committed to the idea of painting as a figurative art, and the abstract or formal value of the discovery of spontaneity remains for him a one-sided achievement if it can be accomplished independently of the representational content in question. For this reason, Houlgate is probably right to observe that the historical Hegel would not have tolerated pure abstraction in painting or the rather severe program of research undertaken by Op-Art.¹²⁹

But there is a simple if hypothetical argument here for the plausibility of abstraction from a Hegelian point of view. Houlgate claims that painting for Hegel must depict "concrete natural and human forms" because "human freedom [is] nothing outside of or apart from [its] concrete embodiment."¹³⁰ But it seems that human freedom can exist for Hegel quite far outside of what we could comfortably call concrete embodiment: namely, in the deeply felt but vaguely defined moods evoked by instrumental music. It seems possible here to draw an analogy between the emergence of painterly abstraction from the history of traditionally figurative religious painting and the emergence of untexted music from the tradition of text-based religious oratorios, masses, and so on. It is true that music, "if it is to be

128 The painter's elevation of semblance, or *Schein*, can promote a kind of naïve idealism, a "mockery, if you like, and an ironical attitude to what exists in nature and externally" (LFA 163, XIII:215). In genre's "triumph" over permanence, Hegel observes, "the substantial is, as it were, cheated of its power over the fleeting" (LFA 599, XIV:227; 1823, Ms. 186).

129 Houlgate, "Hegel and the Art of Painting," 75. With respect to the historical Hegel, Pippin agrees here as well ("What Was Abstract Art?", 5). His reconstruction of a Hegelian view of abstraction proceeds instead from the standpoint of "the immortal Hegel" (23n39).

130 Houlgate, "Hegel and the 'End' of Art," *Owl of Minerva*, 29, 1 (1997), 11.

truly musical,” must become “independent,” in Hegel’s view, freeing itself from libretti and other religious constraints on its meaning. But from the standpoint of the abstractionists, the same liberation might be said to have awaited painting. Moreover, it is not the case that the arrival of independent music in any way trivializes or renders unmusical the earlier tradition: “serious religious music,” Hegel observes, is “among the deepest and most effective things that any art can produce” (LFA 949, xv:211). Unless there is some principled difference in this case between sound and vision, it seems reasonable to think that Hegel’s commitment to the representation of objects and bodies is simply an artifact of his experience rather than a principled position.¹³¹

The real worry for abstraction is not that it would leave the human behind, but that it would lack a project to pursue – that without something like the patterns of melody and harmony that grant structure to music, and make possible its expressive power, abstract painting would be an aimless, frictionless exercise. But as Hegel’s comments on the incipient musicality of painting already make clear, there is no reason to think this would be so. As painting grows absorbed in its own visual effects – the “inherently objectless play of seeming [*Scheinen*]” – and thus increasingly abstract, it draws closer to music, to an art that is purely “expressive of the soul [*seelenhaft*]” (LFA 848, xv:81), for it is the task of music to express “the object-free inner life, abstract subjectivity as such ... the self without any further content” (LFA 891, xv:135). Abstractionists like Kandinsky and Rothko felt their paintings could evoke the very sorts of objectless moods Hegel felt were the proper domain of music. The latter took seriously the fact that his paintings could bring people to tears; the former, Houlgate notes in a useful discussion, spoke of reducing the representational function of his images so as to arouse purely “spiritual vibrations” in the viewer.¹³²

But the quasi-mysticism of Rothko and Kandinsky would not be the only project open to abstractionism on a Hegelian account. Given his acute observations on Dutch technique, we can see that Hegel had already grasped what would become one of the central sources of

¹³¹ It might be objected here that the medium of music is already less “material,” and thereby more suited to abstraction, than the medium of painting. Hegel does indeed make this argument, but, again, presumably because he had never seen abstraction in practice.

¹³² Cited in “Hegel and the Art of Painting,” 72.

interest in the project of modernist painting. “If we take, e.g., Terburg’s [Terborch’s] satin, each spot of colour by itself is a subdued gray, more or less whitish, bluish, yellowish,” Hegel notes, “but when it is looked at from a certain distance there comes out through its position beside another colour the beautiful soft sheen proper to actual satin. And so it is with velvet, the play of light, cloud vapour, and, in general, with everything depicted” (LFA 600, XIV:228). The interest here is not emotional. (“It is not the reflex of the heart which wishes to display itself in subjects such as these.”) Instead, Hegel has discovered here the tension between flatness and depth that is among the organizing ideas of modernist painting. On Clement Greenberg’s famous view, art must assert its essential flatness. But abstraction as such, utterly anti-representational art, exists only at one margin of the modernist tradition.¹³³ “It is said that Hans Hofman, the doyen of New York painting, used to ask his pupils, on joining his studio, to put a black mark on a white canvas,” Richard Wollheim relates, “and then observe how the black was on the white.”¹³⁴ Hegel had noted the germ of the same point – that blues recede while reds advance. As Wollheim says, abstract art “tends to be an art that is at once representational and abstract. Most abstract paintings display images: or, to put the point another way, the experience that we are required to have in front of them is certainly one that involves attention to the marked surface but it is also one that involves an awareness of depth.”¹³⁵ The tension implicit here, or taken up in a painting like Pollock’s *Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)*, is one that a Hegelian account of abstract painting could profitably explore. Houlgate is in fact well aware of the play of surface and depth in Pollock, but allows that the abstraction of his work would amount, for Hegel, to a “retrea[t] into an abstract – indeed sublime – inner life.”¹³⁶ The retreat into the inner life is certainly one possibility here, though Pollock’s musical compositions suggest this would be no less abstract an inner life than that accessed in a sonata by Schubert. And it is even less clear to me that Hegel would consider Pollock’s work a retreat into the sublime. The record of the artist’s presence figures so viscerally – perhaps, in the manner of the Dutch, so *committedly* – in the work, that it seems curious to read the music of *Autumn Rhythm* as an

133 Possibly in monochrome panels.

134 *Art and its Objects*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 12.

135 *Painting as an Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), 62.

136 “Hegel and the Art of Painting,” 72, 74.

effort to spoil understanding, and to aggrandize, by way of its failure, the God or meaning it implies. In Pollock's interpretation of abstract expressionism as a kind of modern heroism, there is much more of the *freie Geist*, of Goethe or Picasso, than there is of Schlegel's weightless irony or the heavy-lidded longings of Novalis.

THE VALUES OF VIRTUOSITY

Even now, what I love above all else is *form*, provided it be beautiful, and nothing beyond it. Women, whose hearts are too ardent and whose minds are too exclusive, do not understand this religion of beauty, beauty without feeling. They always demand a cause, an end. I admire tinsel as much as gold: indeed, the poetry of tinsel is even greater, because it is sadder. The only things that exist for me in the world are beautiful verse, well-turned, harmonious, singing sentences, beautiful sunsets, moonlight, pictures, ancient marbles, and strongly marked faces. Beyond that, nothing. (August 1846)

The time for Beauty is over. Mankind may return to it, but it has no use for the present ... Meanwhile we are in a shadowy corridor, groping in the dark. We are without a lever; the ground is slipping under our feet; we all lack a basis – literati and scribblers as we are. What's the good of all this? Is our chatter the answer to any need? Between the crowd and ourselves no bond exists. Alas for the crowd; alas for us, especially. But since there is a reason for everything, and since the fancy of one individual seems to me just as valid as the appetite of a million men and can occupy an equal place in the world, we must (regardless of material things and of mankind, which disavows us) live for our vocation, climb into our ivory tower, and dwell there along with our dreams. (April 1852)¹

1 *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert: 1830–1857*, ed. F. Steegmuller (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1980), II, 159. Compare: “Modern life is not compatible with beauty, so I won’t mess with it again. I’ve had enough” (November 1864); “To be truthful does not seem to me to be the first requirement for art. The main thing is to aim for beauty, and to attain it if you can” (October 1876).

Flaubert's letters capture with an intensity for which they are famous the double consciousness of the modern artist: aestheticism without beauty, confidence without hope, greatness without fame, and thus perhaps no greatness at all. The letters seem to be written in the wake of Hegel's lectures. A religion of beauty is possible only once religion itself is not; but if religion is finished, then perhaps beauty is as well. What remains, that is, is the beauty of form alone, and yet formal beauty, an aestheticism pure and simple, is not possible, for the posture of the aesthete, as of any artist, is necessarily ethical. Flaubert sees this, sees that a poetry of merely formal beauty must elevate tinsel, in Baudelairean perversity, above gold as an acknowledgement of its own failure to engage the culture itself. An art of beauty just is an art of decadence: "tinsel is even greater, *because it is sadder*." There can be no surprise when the "religion of beauty" is packed up and shut down, for "beauty is over" virtually as soon as it is announced. But if an artist can cancel his projects as easily as he declares them, he is perhaps not entirely *im Ernst*. He is a writer of manifestos, a sloganeer, and less an artist than a theorist of art. Perhaps he is a fraud, or perhaps there is no longer such a thing as fraudulence; the scribblers just are the literati; there is no longer any difference.

And yet behind all of this, behind even the deft self-knowing, there is the vigor of the prose itself. The novels, like the letters, may be so much chatter, but what chatter! This fellow – "*he can paint!*" (LFA 600, XIV:226). He is a virtuoso, and if anyone today can make it through – *durchkommen können*, as Solger had hoped of Novalis or Kleist – it is he. His self-awareness has resisted the dissolutions of self-irony and delivered him the clear consciousness of vocation. This is the fully cultivated individual, the *freie Geist* who will build an art without a "basis," will pass by the "corridor," now in shadows, that once joined him to his culture, and make his home in ivory towers built by hand. Of course, one cannot resist the thought that these are the same towers in which the princes of Mrs. Bovary's novels dwell. The avant-garde's dream of great art, like Emma's dream of true love, may be perfectly beautiful and perfectly banal.

Flaubert's consolations – famously, those of style alone – will likely prove insufficient on Hegel's view, though it is possible he would place *Bovary* in the satirical tradition of *Quixote*, Flaubert's own first and favorite book.² I mention Flaubert because his comments on beauty in

2 For Flaubert's love of Cervantes, see Frederick Brown, *Flaubert* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2006), 31 ff.

art – on the one hand, its impossibility, on the other, his relentless pursuit of beauty alone – sharpen our sense of the predicament. With the passing of Christian painting, romantic art sets out to show “the present itself as it is – even at the cost of sacrificing beauty” (LFA 574).³ But if truth or depth is now the principal value in works of art, what should the artist do with his talents – fold them up and put them away? We can put the problem this way. Beauty was the achievement of a translucence of content through form in which the artist himself remained invisible as well. (Creativity is “not the expression of the self, but the forgetting of the self in the thing” [1826a, Ms. 116].⁴) With the end of an age of beauty, however, the artist and his talents come increasingly into view. And what is this talent but the capacity for beauty? More or less by default, then, virtuosity comes to offer itself in post-religious art as a candidate for appreciation, and perhaps for a reorientation of value in art. One can imagine virtuosity, the display of a capacity for beauty, taking the role once played by beauty itself.

In fact, this is not far from the truth. Virtuosity *alone* is of course only rarely a source of value in art. (We will consider several such cases below.) But this was true of beauty as well, which was valuable in and as the expression of a substantive point of view.⁵ Beauty and virtuosity are terms that relate to the successful treatment of artistic form. Where this treatment concerns form alone, Hegel speaks of formal beauty, and a “formal” virtuosity seems possible here as well. (We will further distinguish between reconciling and oppositional, or positive and negative, species of formal virtuosity.) Where the treatment of form involves its

3 Art is not meant to become ugly, of course; it may explore any topic “if only it does not contradict the formal law of being simply beautiful and capable of artistic treatment” (LFA 605). What would make something incapable of artistic treatment? Internal dissonance is my guess, of the sort Hegel finds in platypuses (LFA 131, XIII:176) and rural diphthongs (LFA 142, XIII:189). Though Hegel does not speak directly, as does Kant, of “disgust [*das Ekel*],” one imagines he would reformulate Kant’s *aesthetic* argument in these *speculative*, or logical, terms. For Kant, the disgusting subject is one that cannot be beautiful because it renders disinterested appreciation impossible. It does this by forcing the mind toward subreption – i.e. toward taking the appearance for the thing. If it is the thing we are judging, however, then we have quit the judgment of taste and entered on a judgment of perfection. For Hegel, of course, we are always engaged in judgments of perfection. The disgusting for him is thus something that seems a violation – or sickly, amphibious combination – of our categories.

4 “[T]he work of art is only then an expression of the God, when there is no sign of subjective particularity in it” (PM §560). The great religious artists were those who adopted the Grand Manner, which is to say no manner at all (LFA 298, XIII:385).

5 This is not to say that beauty and truth are always coincident or equivalent in classical art. Sculpture is more beautiful than tragedy because it is less true, and vice versa.

relationship to content, meanwhile, Hegel speaks of beauty proper, or the beauty of art, and we may speak as well of *artistic* virtuosity.

This will seem a good deal less abstract, I hope, when we consider that we have already studied an example of it, the chief example, in the last chapter. As Christian painting wore on and the background began to admit more and more of daily life, Hegel observes, the rift between emotional expression and painterly technique continued to grow until it seemed, in the rise of still life, that the two projects had become entirely uncoupled. Into this gulf steps genre painting, the achievement of which is the reconciliation of these two projects, the bringing to bear of merely formal virtuosity upon merely trivial content in such a way that the elevation of the latter is precisely the realization, the making actual, of the former. The everyday is brought to life by the attention of the great talent, and the mere talent becomes a great artist in absorbing himself in, committing himself to, the life he has ensouled. What I want to begin to show in this chapter is that the achievement of the genre painters – Dutch, Spanish, and Italian – establishes for Hegel a model of successful modern art that prepares us, as perhaps it prepared him, to understand the achievement of modern literature, and the poetry of reconciliation in particular. In a study of Hegel's theory of figurative language toward the end of this chapter, we will see how the poetic simile (though, curiously, not the metaphor) permits an absorption, or *Vertiefung*, in the materials of daily life that mirrors the *Sich-einleben* of the painter in his art and of the painting's subject in his task. Such figures are central to the Persian lyrics of Hafiz and will be revived by Goethe in his *Divan*, further establishing the importance of what I have just called artistic virtuosity to Hegel's theory of modern art.

The two-stage movement at work in the art of genre painting – the acknowledgement of daily life, and its supersession in liveliness – forms the template of what I referred to in [chapter 1](#) as the art of banality, the final and enduring phase of late romantic art. This is not a template I have discovered, but merely one I have tried to bring to prominence. Hegel announces it in the passage that, it should be increasingly clear, forms the central inspiration for the present study. Arriving at a moment of crisis in his engagement with contemporary art, a crisis that simply marks the transition from a religious to a secular tradition, Hegel asks whether the paintings and poems of everyday life, the products of a possibly enervated naturalism, deserve “in general still to be called works of art.” The answer, like the question, has been cited above. “[W]e may not deny the name of works of art to the creations of this sphere” so long as we keep in mind

the artist's subjective conception and execution of the work of art, the aspect of the individual talent which can remain faithful both to the manifestations of spirit and also to the inherently substantial life of nature, even in the extreme limits of contingency which that life reaches, and can make significant even what is in itself without significance, and this it does through this fidelity and through the most marvelous skill of the portrayal. (LFA 596, XIV:223-4)

The present chapter has two aims: first, to consider cases of what I have just called formal virtuosity, positive and negative; and, second, to distinguish the elements of a specifically literary virtuosity that will help us, in the final two chapters, to offer an account of objective humor in terms of that two-part movement of acknowledgement and supersession mentioned above. Because there is not much resemblance among the forms of virtuosity I hope to distinguish, nor among the works in which they appear, the coherence of this chapter will appear somewhat looser than that of the previous one, which was devoted to painting alone. I will begin by sketching a definition of virtuosity and considering it as a freestanding source of value (“*Virtuosity*”) followed by an account of the particular faculties, wit and imagination, that comprise virtuosity in literature (“*Wit and imagination*”). Having considered the situation in which the modern writer finds herself vis-à-vis the language (“*Poetry and prose*”), we can then consider the roles of wit and imagination in accounts of the fable (“*The fable: wit and prose*”) and figurative language (“*Metaphor, image, and simile*” and “*The uses of figurative language*”).

The values of virtuosity have not yet received the attention I think they deserve in commentaries on the *Aesthetics*, perhaps because Hegel does not develop much terminology here – he does not distinguish sharply between the betrayal of skill and its conscious expression – but more probably because he warns so often and so steadily against its risks. As Flaubert's letters suggest, a devotion to form alone can collapse back on itself, leaving the religion of beauty a posture and the writer a fraud. Pippin has drawn particular attention to this feature of Hegel's thought, to his awareness that the risk of fraudulence is not only a possibility in but something like a constitutive feature of the creation and reception of modern works of art.⁶ Accordingly, he suggests, what comes to take the place of beauty in modern art

6 Particularly in his “Authenticity in Painting: Remarks on Michael Fried's Art History,” *Critical Inquiry*, 31, 3 (2005).

will on a Hegelian account be something like authenticity, or “genuineness,” a quality we might think of as involving not just honesty, as against outright fraud, but an acknowledgement that honesty itself is nearly impossible to gauge, or claim, absent of that shared conception, that “basis,” of which Flaubert speaks. My thought here is simply that genuineness seems necessary for art but not sufficient.⁷ In the terms suggested above, the artist must first acknowledge the banality of her world before she reconciles us to it. Keeping Pippin’s point in mind, we can expand this notion of acknowledgement to include an awareness of the limitations and perhaps the seductions of technique alone. But acknowledgement is not yet affirmation. (Or: confession is not yet forgiveness.) To win a view of freedom not only from fraudulence but in the world will require the very displays of skill that, pursued for their own sake, are fraudulence itself.

Virtuosity

Hegel refers to the growing importance of skill and technique as the ascent of “subjectivity” in modern art,⁸ but a more useful term is virtuosity.⁹ Originally reserved for performance alone, the word is now standardly applied to the creation and composition of works in all

7 Pippin suggests that a Hegelian account of modern art would emphasize the value of “genuineness,” or “the capacity to compel conviction at all under these conditions [of the constitutive possibility of fraudulence], to invite interpretation and reflection in the right way” (“The Absence of Aesthetics in Hegel’s Aesthetics” in F.C. Beiser, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008], 417, cf. 412). Pippin seems to acknowledge that, on Hegel’s own view, the value of such genuineness is not enough to establish the vitality of a post-romantic art (417n48).

8 “[I]t is the subjectivity of the artist which, with its feeling and insight, with the right and power of its wit, can rise to mastery of the whole of reality; it leaves nothing in its usual context and in the validity which it has for our usual way of looking at things” (LFA 595, XIV:222).

9 Though commentators have tended to make passing reference to the lyric poet’s wit or the genre painter’s skill, the broader topic of virtuosity as a distinct species of value has gone uncharted. This is likely because, as noted, Hegel lacks a master term for the subject I have been considering. In Hotho’s edition, the term “*Virtuosität*” is employed broadly if not frequently. (For classical bronze sculpture cf. LFA 775, XIV:441; in Dutch painting, 883, xv:125; in musicianship, 956–8, xv:219–22; in modern German drama, 597, XIV:225; in lyric generally, 1126, xv:435. The exception mentioned makes sense insofar as virtuosity is tied to a notion of individual creativity of which Hegel sees little evidence in the collaborative work of architecture.) Hegel speaks with greater frequency of: skill (*Geschicklichkeit*), talent (*Talent*), genius (*Genie*), fidelity (*Wahrheit*), imagination (*Phantasie*), liveliness (*Lebendigkeit*), and wit (*Witz*).

mediums.¹⁰ I will use it, broadly, to suggest the variety of ways in which an artist may display mastery in and over those materials and methods central to her art. Here I follow a definition of terms proposed by the philosopher Thomas Mark:

Sometimes skill is incidental, a means to an end. Where skill is thus incidental, present merely in that the artwork is a product of skill, [we may say that] the artwork *shows* skill. But sometimes skill is not incidental. There are artworks in which the exhibition of skill becomes an end in itself, and in such cases [we may say that] the artwork *displays* skill. Artworks in which the display of skill is made a central feature [may be called] *works of virtuosity*.¹¹

Not just any skills will do, of course: a short story is not enhanced by geometric proofs. The work of virtuosity must display those skills, accordingly, “that are its own necessary conditions.”¹² Mark’s examples include both opera singing and, happily, Dutch genre painting, each of which typically requires and displays fluency in the manipulation of a sensitive instrument.

The virtuoso, a Hegelian might be tempted to say, is the artist utterly at home in her own activity. In fact, this is not quite right. Surely Phidias, whom Hegel ranks among the greatest visual artists ever to have lived, is “at home” in the practice of his art. (If not, who is?) And yet Hegel does not appear to consider him a virtuoso, at least not in the sense Mark has in mind. There are many works, the Elgin marbles among them, that both require skill and reveal it to the audience. Perhaps this revelation even amounts at points to an end in itself, yielding what Mark calls a display of skill.¹³ Yet this display is never treated by the Greek sculptor as a central feature of the work, Hegel thinks. Phidias’ admirers, at any rate, have never taken it as such: it is not the “elegance and audacity of the execution” that has earned his renown but the “harmonious unity” of his figures, their “expression of independence, of self-repose” (LFA 725, 724, XIV:379–80). By contrast, the romantic arts tend in general toward a self-conscious display of skill: painters

10 Thomas Carlson Mark, “On Works of Virtuosity,” *Journal of Philosophy*, 77, 1 (1980), 29–30.

11 *Ibid.*, 29. 12 *Ibid.*, 35.

13 The distinction between “showing” and “displaying” skill is perhaps best captured by way of an analogy with a closely parallel distinction regarding the display of the emotions. Dewey distinguishes between “discharging” emotion (merely blurring it out) and “expressing” it (consciously shaping and releasing it) (*Art As Experience* [New York: Perigree, 1980], ch. 4). Collingwood, several years later, draws the same

indulge “appearance for its own sake” (LFA 598, XIV:226); in lyric “the topics are wholly accidental, and the important thing is only the poet’s treatment and presentation” (LFA 1115, XV:421); and in music “two miracles have occurred ... one in conception, the other in the genius of virtuosi in the execution” (LFA 936, XV:195).

Borrowing from Danto’s discussion in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, Mark recasts his earlier formulation as the requirement that a work of virtuosity must be “*about* the skills that it requires.”¹⁴ We might take this to mean the artist must in some suitably generous sense *intend* the display of virtuosity, though questions of intention are never foremost in Hegel’s mind.¹⁵ A more likely suggestion is that the work manages to be about its own skill by guiding our attention to its presence, and one way in which it can do this is simply by attempting difficult tasks. Emphasis on the difficulty of a task comes most sharply into view when a statement of the task itself exists independently of the record of its attempt. This is the case in musical performance, where the composer and the musician are often different people. Of course it is possible to make out attempts at difficult tasks in the non-performing arts, as in the Dutch fascination with effects of light on glass and metal or Joyce’s parody of English literary forms in Chapter 14 of *Ulysses*. The role played by the spectator’s awareness of difficulty in works of virtuosity helps us see more directly why a talent like Phidias’ can never amount, for Hegel, to a display of virtuosity: namely, because nothing like “difficulty” can even enter the experience of a work devoted to the expression (and divinization) of “calm [*Ruhe*]” and “self-repose [*Beruhens-auf-sich*].”

In general, then, I will mean by virtuosity a display of those skills relevant to the work’s creation that is in some way and to some significant degree about those skills themselves. We can consider such

distinction between the “betrayal” of emotion and its conscious expression (*The Principles of Art* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958], 121–4).

14 “On Works of Virtuosity,” 36; emphasis mine. The appeal to Danto comes slightly earlier, at 33–4.

15 For the notion of a suitably generous understanding of intentions in art, see Richard Wollheim, *Painting as an Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987). For sophisticated contemporary versions of intentionalism, see Noël Carroll, *Beyond Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) or Robert Stecker, *Interpretation and Construction: Art, Speech, and the Law* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003). Hegel’s own sense is likely to be that the notion of a work’s intention emerges in the process of interpreting it. It is not available at the outset, that is, to guide interpretation. See Pippin, “Absence of Aesthetics.”

displays either in their interaction with the work's content, as in our study of genre painting, or we can consider them (in romantic art, at least) largely on their own. At the end of [chapter 2](#), recall, we discussed the ways in which Dutch experimentation satisfied one aspect of what Hegel called the abstract or "formal" need for art. This was the need for self-recognition in another; a recognition achieved in that case when the painter allowed us to pick up the signs of our own spontaneity in his decomposition of the color manifold. (Whether or not this decomposition merely requires or actively expresses painterly skill, whether or not it is virtuosic, is not terribly important, though I imagine that as we approach the canvas, walk away from it, and approach it again, noticing our own eyes perform the magic synthesis, we are quite conscious of and thankful for the painter's gifts.¹⁶) That form of self-recognition was what Hegel calls "theoretical" insofar as it involved the spontaneity of the mind. We can now consider the "practical" recognition of self in art, that is, the spontaneity of the artist's will in its relationship to the natural world.¹⁷

The practical satisfaction of the formal need for art assumes, in the first instance, an oppositional stance toward the given world. The artist intervenes in order to "impres[s] the seal of his inner being" upon it and thereby "to strip the external world of its inflexible foreignness" and "enjoy in the shape of things only an external realization" of himself (LFA 31, XIII:51). Such self-impressions are at first cheerfully crude: Hegel imagines a boy who "throws stones into the river and now marvels at the circles drawn in the water as an effect in which he gains an intuition of something that is his own doing." A more sophisticated version of this project is the example mentioned above of the northern painter's fascination with metal and glass. It is more sophisticated, moreover, not because painting optical effects is more difficult than throwing stones but because what is at stake in the latter is in Hegel's view more particular and more interesting than the mere self-impression of one's being. "In nature," Hegel observes, "everything is ephemeral. The spectator is subject to [*dient*] the moment. [But] artistic presentation fixes this fleetingness and

16 On the whole, I should note, the occasion that painting offers for exploring our spontaneity is not one that a defense of art's indispensability ought to emphasize too much since its achievements can largely be duplicated by opticians and psychologists of perception. Painters certainly deserve credit for opening up this field of research, but its pursuit no longer requires their contributions.

17 For another presentation of the theoretical/practical split, see LFA 286, XIII:370.

gives it permanence" (1823, Ms. 240; LFA 163, XIII:216). In mastering "the lustre of metal, the shimmer of a bunch of grapes," painters not only show off their skill, in a general sense, but achieve "a triumph of art over the transitory" (LFA 599, XIV:227; 1823, Ms. 186), and thus a conquest of time itself, of one of the basic forms of our experience, just as the compression of sculptural into illusionistic depth had been the conquest of space. Virtuosity takes on a particular meaning here: the artist's talent is displayed over and in spite of nature and thus demonstrates the powerful negativity of mindedness, its raw capacity to manipulate the given forms of experience and conceive things as other than they are.¹⁸

Even as a formal value, this display of negative virtuosity remains one-sided. As we saw in [chapter 1](#), art presents the Idea to the senses; that is, it embodies the achieved reconciliation of central oppositions in human life, those of "spirit against flesh ... inner freedom and the necessity of external nature ... theory or subjective thinking, and objective existence and experience" (LFA 53–4, XIII:80). (Philosophy, which stood "burdened with abstraction," seemed only to aggravate these tensions, to conduct the senses further into "servitude" [LFA 1006, XV:282].) But there are forms of virtuosity, or aspects of its display, that can help to close this gulf. It would be wrong to make too much of these cases, which are related to Hegel's actual use of the term *Virtuosität*. They are not only marginal to begin with, but for reasons having to do with the rise of technology in the arts their occasions are perhaps increasingly rare. Nonetheless, they capture a dimension of the experience of art deeply familiar to us and yet rarely discussed by philosophers of art (particularly cognitivists like Hegel).

"Virtuosity," he observes in a passage on musical performance, consists in "solving correctly the most difficult problems of the composition on its technical side and in that process avoiding any appearance of struggling with a difficulty laboriously overcome but [instead]

18 There is something here of the stone thrower writing his signature on the pond: "What at once claims our attention [in genre and still life] is the pure seeming and appearing of objects as something produced by the *spirit*" (LFA 162, XIII:214). Elsewhere, Hegel notes a parallel between contemporaneous advances in early modern painting and philosophy: "While the spirit reproduces itself in thinking, in comprehending the world in ideas and thoughts, the chief thing [in the modern era] ... is the subjective recreation of the external world in the visible element of colours and lighting" (LFA 599, XIV:228).

moving in this technical element with complete freedom" (LFA 956, xv:219–20). This is a subtly different form of virtuosity from the one considered above. There, it was the subjection *of* externality that mattered. Here, it is something more like fluency *within* that external world. Virtuosity in performance consists in the deft resolution of tensions internal to the brief the artist has assigned herself; no sooner do we become aware of the fact that the work is faced, on its own terms, with some particular challenge – and it must allow us to become aware of this – than we sense that these have already been resolved. The suggestion is a natural one¹⁹ and of obvious appeal to Hegel. If we consider how an "appearance of struggling [*Ringen*]" recalls both Fichte's ethic of "striving [*Streben*]" and the aesthetic corollary of that striving in the Kantian and post-Kantian figure of the sublime, we can recognize in virtuosity, or effortless reconciliation, the antipodes of Romanticism.

The third part of Hegel's lectures, on the individual arts, brims with discussions of technical issues: the relative sculptural virtues of gold and bronze, color theory, the power of iambic trimeter and the historical development of acting as an artform. The cases in which the sort of positive virtuosity just sketched come most clearly to the fore are those in which a live performance, or its immediate record, is presented in the work. Consider the case of freehand drawing. Hegel's praise here comes as something of a surprise. When Louis XIV ordered the reorganization of the *Académie française* in 1661, a debate broke out between advocates of color and advocates of line – the *rubenistes* and *poussinistes*, respectively – that shaped, or colored, the discussion of painting well into the nineteenth century. Formalists like Kant tend, unsurprisingly, to favor Poussin.²⁰ Hegel, following Goethe, takes color as the fundamental visual phenomenon: "it is color, *coloring*, which makes a painter a painter."²¹ And yet, he cautions,

19 "Virtuosity might be thought to be the exhibition of something difficult done without apparent effort," Ted Cohen notes. (*Thinking of Others: On the Talent for Metaphor* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008], 58. Cohen offers examples from both music and sport.

20 "In painting, in sculpture, indeed in all the visual arts . . . *design* is what is essential; in design the basis for any involvement of taste is not what gratifies us in sensation, but merely what we like because of its form. The colors that illuminate the outline belong to charm . . . they cannot make it beautiful" (CJ §14, Ak. V:225). Schelling shares Kant's *poussinisme*; cf. Schelling, *Philosophy of Art*, trans. D.W. Stott (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 169 (cited in S. Houlgate, "Hegel and the Art of Painting" in William Maker, ed., *Hegel and Aesthetics* [Albany: SUNY Press, 2000], 66).

21 He thereby anticipates the contemporary achievements, of which he appears to have been unaware, of Gericault and Delacroix.

this is not to imply that significant value is to be denied to the drawings, and especially the free-hand drawings, of great masters like Raphael and Albrecht Dürer. On the contrary, from one point of view it is precisely these free-hand drawings which have the greatest interest because we see in them the miracle that the whole spirit of the artist passes over immediately into the manual dexterity which with the greatest ease, without groping, sets before us ... everything that the artist's spirit contains ... [C]onception and execution appear as one and the same. (LFA 838, xv:69)

The value of such virtuosity here is not concerned with the display of a mastery *over* nature, or a freedom from it. Rather, the hand and mind of the virtuoso are so tightly united that the inwardly perceived image is rendered immediately and without constraint on the page. Freehand drawing thus presents us with the image of a freedom not from but in nature. In other words, it exhibits the Idea, “formally,” to the senses.²²

In [chapter 2](#), we discussed the notion of the artist's self-investment in or inhabitation of (*Sichseinleben*) the everyday world and the activity of his artmaking. In Hotho's edition, Hegel holds out the possibility of this affirmative virtuosity to all three of the romantic arts, to poetry (as we will see in [Chapter 4](#)) and music as well.²³ In Italian opera, Hegel observes, the singer “has freer scope” than in traditional choral works; unrestrained by the text, “he displays his inventive genius ... his mastery in execution and, so long as he proceeds with spirit, skill and grace, he may even interrupt the melody with jokes, caprices, and virtuosity” (LFA 956–7, xv:220–1).²⁴ The expressive power of

22 In the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel speaks suggestively of an “ethical virtuosity.” (The analogy to artistic virtuosity is underscored by the notes to the section, which include the phrase “Greek, work of art”; PR §150.) Pinkard has this analogy in mind when he characterizes ethical virtuosity as “a way of orienting ourselves in social space” in which we are able to “mov[e] from the particular to a practical judgment without being able to state a rule” (“Virtues, Morality, and *Sittlichkeit*: From Maxims to Practices,” *European Journal of Philosophy*, 7, 2 [1999], 226). (This is a Kantian formulation, but it suits Hegel well enough here. The true precursor to “ethical virtuosity,” meanwhile, is Schiller's notion of *Anmut*, or grace.)

23 In the realism that comes to the fore in the modern period, “there is made obvious ... a reflection of the spirit, because in the manner of their artistic realization they make visible the participation of the spirit, the liveliness [*Lebendigkeit*] of their treatment, the investment [*Sichseinleben*] of the mind itself in this ultimate extreme of externality, and thereby something inner and ideal” (LFA 794, xiv:13). It is no accident, meanwhile, that the virtuosity found in painting, drawing, and musical performance is absent from the pre-romantic arts of sculpture and architecture, epic and drama. My claim, again, is that virtuosity replaces beauty as a source of artistic value.

24 Gethmann-Siefert, who offers a useful discussion of Hegel's interest in opera, ignores this dimension.

this virtuosity is felt even more distinctly, Hegel continues, when the instrument in question is not a human voice but “an external matter, a dead thing.” In such cases, “if the externality of the music disappears altogether, i.e. if inner music penetrates this external reality through and through, then in this virtuosity the foreign instrument appears as a perfectly developed organ of the artistic soul and its very own property” (LFA 957, xv:221). Hegel here recounts a memory from his youth of “a virtuoso on the guitar.” Though the instrument was itself “trivial” and the music “tastelessly composed,” the troubadour “produced marvelous effects because he put into his instrument his whole soul.” Here again the image of a *Sichseinleben* is suggested. What we are enjoying when we admire John Sargent’s confident brushstrokes, or John Coltrane’s dizzy riffs is, in Hegel’s view, an image of spirit’s reconciliation with nature.

[I]n the case of executants of genius, their works reveal their incredible mastery in and over their instrument; the virtuoso can overcome the restrictions of his instrument and now and again, as an audacious proof of this victory, can go through the gamut of the different sorts of sound given by instruments other than his own. In this sort of execution we enjoy the topmost peak of musical liveliness [*Lebendigkeit*], the wonderful secret of an external tool’s becoming a perfectly animated instrument. (LFA 958, xv:222)

In freeing himself from the constraints of materiality, the virtuoso displays mastery *over* his materials. And yet, in his ability to translate ideas seamlessly into his medium, he displays his freedom *in* that medium as well. The virtuoso discovers the pineal gland, so to speak, and presents as a reconciled whole the standing opposition of body and mind. Our sense of the difficulty involved, moreover, lends the performance a dramatic quality, a sense of dynamism, registered in the reference to *Lebendigkeit*.

Why does Hegel fail to feature this sort of positive virtuosity, so closely related to his own insistence upon the achievement of reconciliation, more centrally in the lectures? First, it remains a formal experience, one whose success or failure has nothing to do with the content of the work. (The guitar player’s music was tasteless, after all.) Second, such virtuosity is a comparatively ahistorical phenomenon. True, virtuosity of this sort cannot emerge in the classical era. (A virtuoso on the lyre would somehow be swallowed up, one imagines, in the festival in which he performed. More generally, the virtuoso’s

solution to our “amphibi[ous]” condition [LFA 54, XIII:80] does not come into view for the Greek audience, for whom the boundary of body and soul seems barely to exist.) But once we are in the realm of romantic art, there is relatively little difference between virtuosity with the guitar, the mandolin, the dulcimer, or even the voice, the pencil, and so on. The exception here is literature, whose medium, to which we turn in this section and the next, undergoes profound historical changes.

Wit and imagination

What is virtuosity in literature? Following the cases of drawing and musicianship, we might expect it to involve the elements of style: a knack for versification, a rich lexicon, a fluency with idiom and register, and so on. That this is not so is a consequence of literature’s exceptionalism, its place behind rather than among the particular arts. Like sculpture and architecture, painting and music are sensuous mediums in which skill amounts to a mastery of technique and thereby of a recalcitrant physicality.²⁵ It is true that language is a sensuous medium as well: words are of certain lengths, correspond to certain sounds, and are concatenated according to certain rules. But though literature is realized in language, its true medium is *Vorstellung*, Hegel argues, the realm of ideas in general,²⁶ and the poet’s virtuosity amounts to a fluency not of language but of mind.²⁷ The power of mind that bears on artistic creation is that of imagination, or *Phantasie*, and, secondarily, that of wit. Let’s consider these two faculties.

According to a traditional view, present in Augustine and echoed by Kant, imagination is the capacity to picture in the mind something

25 Hegel speaks of “*Geschicklichkeit*” in matters of technique – for instance, “copying natural forms” – as an inborn talent (LFA 41, XIII:64).

26 “[T]he element in which poetry moves, i.e. ideas [*Vorstellungen*], is of a spiritual kind and therefore enjoys the universality of thought” as against the particularity of matter (LFA 961, xv:225). It is for this reason that Hegel thinks translation poses no essential threats to the integrity of literary works.

27 Poetry is “exempt from the complete embodiment of its productions in a particular material,” and “therefore a talent for it is less subject to such specific conditions” – less concerned with technique – “and so is more general and independent.” In the end, “all that it requires is a gift for richly imaginative formulations” (LFA 997, xv:271). Suppleness of mind is a less “natural” talent than, say, a fine tenor voice or a calligraphic hand, which is why poetic greatness emerges only later in life. And yet it remains in part a gift.

that is not present before it.²⁸ Kant refines this view in any number of ways, of which two are important for Hegel's account: the notion of imagination as the interval between sensation and understanding, and the distinction between a reproductive imagination suited to everyday cognition and a productive imagination capable of true creativity. Hegel's revision of the Kantian distinction is worked out in the *Encyclopedia* "Psychology" as one between the "associative" and the "symbolizing" imaginations,²⁹ of which the latter is subject to guidance by a higher principle of composition. The principles themselves differ, of course: in Kant's view, the artist is guided by the "ratio" of order to disorder present in her "common sense"; for Hegel, meanwhile, the artist's imagination must come under the guidance of the embodied Idea, or, the beautiful ideal. *Phantasie* is not a purely literary skill, of course; it is "the *general* capacity for artistic production" (LFA 281, XIII:363; 1826a, Ms. 114), "the universal foundation of all the particular art-forms and the individual arts" (LFA 967, xv:233).

Artistic imagination is fully creative: it fashions its own materials – gods, heroes – and a fortiori the relations among them. *Einbildungskraft*, or associative imagination, is by contrast a receptive faculty.³⁰ It takes up its materials from the world and can invent or discover only the relationships among them. Taking the world as it finds it, this sort of imagination cannot achieve the beautiful, but it can be creative, to a degree, when the connections it hits upon are surprising and apt. In that case *Einbildungskraft* acts "subjectively," and the result is wit,³¹ a faculty Hegel defines, conventionally, as the capacity to find

28 It is the capacity to intuit an object "even *without* the presence of an object" (Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, ed. and trans. R. Loudon [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006], §15 [Ak. VII:153]; henceforth, *Anthropology*). I borrow this way of setting out the problem as well as the references from Leslie Stevenson, "Twelve Concepts of Imagination," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 43, 3 (2003), 238–9.

29 In fact, the terminological distinctions are quite confusing, thanks in part to Boumann's *Zusätze*. In the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, however, the picture is significantly more simple, and I follow Pillow in distinguishing broadly between the "play of associative *Einbildungskraft*" and the "symbolizing *Phantasie*" at work in artistic creation (*Sublime Understanding: Aesthetic Reflection in Kant and Hegel* [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000], 177; 161–2).

30 Artworks "have their origin in the heart and unregulated *Phantasie*" while they "exercise their effect only on feeling and *Einbildungskraft*" (LFA 12, XIII:27). Hegel often uses "*Einbildungskraft*" when referring to the spectator's point of view (1823, Ms. 127, 277). Historical references to *Phantasie* center on the wild inventions of Indian mythology (LFA 332–5, XIII:430–2).

31 Hegel speaks of "subjective *Einbildungskraft* und Witz" at 1823, Ms. 137.

“related traits in the apparently most heterogeneous material” (LFA 407, XIII:522).³² The place of wit in a philosophy of literature had of course become a charged topic for Hegel in the wake of the *Athenaeum Fragments*. Schiller had alluded in *Naïve and Sentimental Poetry* to what he considered the Gallic habit of overestimating the value of wit.³³ But it is only with Schlegel and Novalis – whose fragmentary theories of the fragment, ironic accounts of irony, and (according to one’s taste) witty epigrams on wit perform that frenzied doubling, that raising of thought to the second power, that is the *Fragments’* central figure – that a philosophical defense of wit comes into view.³⁴ One cannot help but admire the vigor with which Friedrich Schlegel pursues his aim: “If wit in all its manifestations is the principle and the organ of universal philosophy, and if all philosophy is nothing but the spirit of universality, the science of all the eternally uniting and dividing sciences, a logical chemistry” – how’s that for an antecedent? – “then the value and importance of that absolute, enthusiastic, thoroughly material wit is infinite, that wit wherein Bacon and Leibniz, the chief representatives of scholastic prose, were masters.” The remarkable idea here – it really is witty – is that wit is itself the structure of scientific thought because science just is the discovery of surprising connections in the apparently most heterogeneous material. “The most important scientific discoveries are bon mots of this sort – are so because of the surprising contingency of their origin, the unifying force of their thought, and the baroqueness of their casual expression.”³⁵ In other words, *F = ma* is the greatest one-liner ever told.

Hegel’s rejoinder is not to dismiss the Romantic theory of wit as the sort of youthful self-promotion, the work of magazine writers and *litterateurs* on the make that it must have seemed from the vantage point of 1820, but to take this theory perhaps more seriously than

32 Cf. PM §455. Jean Paul criticizes this characterization on the grounds that it cannot account for “circular wit.” For instance, “when Lessing says ‘spice the spice,’ there is wit without any remote similarity” (*Horn of Oberon: Jean Paul Richter’s School for Aesthetics*, trans. M.R. Hale [Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1973], 121; henceforth, *Horn*; *Vorschule der Ästhetik* [Hamburg: Meiner, 1990], §43; henceforth, *Vorschule*).

33 “It may be said in passing, that the practice of labeling all so-called works of wit ‘poetic’ is completely unjustified, although for a long time, misled by respect for French literature, we have confused such works with poetic works” (Schiller, *Essays*, ed. W. Hinderer and D.O. Dahlstrom [New York: Continuum, 1993], 200).

34 Wit is “an explosion of confined spirit,” “logical sociability,” “fragmentary genius,” and so on (F. Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. P. Firchow [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991], 2, Critical Fragments 90, 56, 9, henceforth, CF). 11, 7

35 *Philosophical Fragments*, 47, CF 220.

its authors had. His objection itself appears somewhat alarmist: wit does not merely disregard traditional values and sources of authority, it “derange[s]” them (LFA 576, XIV:198). The idea is this. Given that wit is a receptive rather than a creative faculty, it “signifies *relationships*,” as Jean Paul puts it in a treatise with which Hegel was familiar, “and not *objects*.”³⁶ (Schlegel’s way of putting the point was to speak of wit as “chemical spirit,” that is, as concerned with the formation and dissolution of *bonds* among indifferent bits of matter.) Because the wit is interested in the relation alone, and not the relata, she treats the latter equally; better, she treats them equally precisely when they are unequal, for a connection between a serious and a trivial subject is likely to prove the most surprising. The wit thus presents himself as an aesthete essentially indifferent toward the world, an “equal-opportunity offender,” as the saying goes. Hegel’s point, however, is that all aestheticisms, because they are morally neutral, are in fact morally perverse. This, again, is the logic of Flaubert’s letter: if gold and tinsel are of equal beauty, then tinsel is of greater beauty.

Hegel’s term for a literature of pure virtuosity, of wit and imagination alone, is humor, or *das Humoristische* in general (1826b, Ms. 56).³⁷ In the case of the rustic guitarist, a bland composition played on a “trivial” instrument could succeed simply by virtue of the skill the performance displayed. But this is not the case in literature, which does not permit such sharp distinctions between the artist’s brief (the score) and its realization (the performance). Humor is a dead end, “das Ende des Romantischen” (1823, Ms. 183). It is worth noting here that the wit need not see himself as a moral saboteur. He is simply a virtuoso of ideas, a mind possessed, in Schlegel’s phrase, of “the clear consciousness of eternal agility.”³⁸ The wit imagines his aim as the assertion of his own brilliance rather than the destruction of ethical substance: “In humor the particular artist steps out against all the objectivity of the material and validates his subjectivity over and above it” (1823, Ms. 187). “[W]hat is at issue there is essentially the spiritual worth of his personality” (LFA 600, XIV:229).³⁹ Jean Paul rules as the prince of his own point of view.

³⁶ Emphasis added. *Horn*, 131; *Vorschule*, §50.

³⁷ This appears as “subjective humor” in Hotho in order to distinguish it from “true humor.” See [chapter 5](#).

³⁸ This is one of his many formulations of “irony” (*Philosophical Fragments*, 100).

³⁹ In humor, “the idiosyncrasy, yes the idiosyncrasy, of the artist [is] conspicuous as the chief thing” (LFA 295, XIII:381).

Humor, or the literature of virtuosity, is what I referred to in [chapter 1](#) as a form of non-art.⁴⁰ The transition from here to Romantic irony, or what I called anti-art, is one whose outlines Hegel has already worked out in Chapter 6 of the *Phenomenology*. There, the Jean Paul figure, the “moral genius” who “in the majesty of its elevation above specific law and every content of duty” enjoys “in its own self divine worship,” was led to a self-ironizing attitude when forced to defend that claim to majesty before the rest of the moral community.⁴¹ In the *Aesthetics*, this shift takes place when the wit comes to see the truth of his position, namely, that the virtuosic elevation of the self proceeds only by way of the “derangement and perversion” of what matters to the culture (LFA 601, XIV:229). The virtuoso who appreciates the inherent negativity of his position becomes the ironist who “sacrific[es] himself and his topics alike” (LFA 601, XIV:229) and is left to “carr[y] on the business of joking merely for the sake of joking” (LFA 296, XIII:382) – not because it is brilliant or witty, in other words, but because it is simply his role.

To review: the possibility of what I have called positive or reconciling virtuosity, the spectator’s sense of seeing what it would be like to be fully at home in one’s body or one’s medium, is possible only when that medium stands apart from the artist and confronts him as something stubbornly physical. If we think of words themselves as the medium of literature, it is clearly possible to imagine a corresponding sense of literary virtuosity, that sense we have of Shakespeare’s being fully at home in the lexicon, of what Cavell calls “freedom of language, having the run of it, as if successfully claimed from it, as of a birthright.”⁴² James Wood writes of Melville’s seeming desire to pack every word in *Webster’s Dictionary* into *Moby-Dick*, an ambition he suggests is native to the novel itself: “when it comes to language, all writers want to be billionaires”; “to be utterly free in language, to be absolute commander of what you do not own – that is the greatest desire of any writer.”⁴³ But for Hegel the medium of literature is not words but thoughts, and thoughts are precisely what we *do* own, all of us, already. For this reason, there is no such thing for Hegel as the poet’s taming of otherness

40 “[H]umoristische Werke sind eigentlich nicht mehr Kunstwerke” (1826b, Ms. 56).

41 PhS §655 and ff.

42 Stanley Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America* (Albuquerque, NM: Living Batch Press, 1989), 55; cited in R.T. Eldridge, “Introduction” in Eldridge, ed., *Stanley Cavell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1.

43 *The Broken Estate* (New York: Random House, 1999), 26.

or externality and thus no chance of a positive virtuosity, of a facility and ease of movement that suggests our capacity of *being* at home by *making* ourselves at home, by the work of *Sich-einleben*.

But what I now want to show is that, having issued his polemics against the Schlegels and his warnings about the corruption of youth by local wits, Hegel nonetheless considers writerly virtuosity, the conscious display of imagination, an indispensable element of modern literature and of the substantial if occasional successes it can hope to enjoy. The development of this idea will center on Hegel's theory of figurative language, of which we will make a study in the [sections](#) on metaphor and simile, below. For the moment, we can simply point out the virtues of writerliness implicit in the above critique of its abuse. Wit is "surprising" (LFA 1115, xv:421) and "bold" (LFA 1149, xv:464); imagination is the capacity to "launch out beyond nature" and conceive the world anew (LFA 5, xiii:18). In the virtuosic poetry of Mediterranean Europe (Spain and Italy) and medieval Persia the imagination wishes, on one level, simply to display its "boldness," to "delight in the wealth and brilliance of its images without any further aim" (LFA 411, xiii:527).⁴⁴ What *Phantasie* and *Einbildungskraft* have in common is simply *Kraft* as such. Here again we have the "practical" satisfaction of the "formal" need for art – the boy throwing rocks, the painter stopping time. But the abstract power of literary creativity is also something singular. Architecture, sculpture, painting, and music involve a blend of creativity and manual craft; but it is only in virtue of the former that they count as works of art. Literature, which involves no manual craft, is purely creative. "*Poesie* in general, as the very word indicates" – namely, as a cognate of the Greek *poiein* – "is something *made* [*ein Gemachtes*]," Hegel observes.⁴⁵ In metaphor it is "the subjective art of the poet as maker" that commands our attention (LFA 396, xiii:214) while the "witty play of diction" displays "the free pleasure of making" (LFA 1011, xv:288; cf. 1820, Ms. 237). Where drawing and musicianship display a *techné*, a

44 Cf. 1820, Ms. 237. It is with this sense of boldness in mind that August Schlegel says poetry requires "at [its] base a genuine leap of imagination [*Sprung der Phantasie*]" (*Vorlesungen*, I, 292). More to the point, he defines the lyric, the genre in which imagination and wit are most at home, by just such a display: "Epic, lyric, dramatic; thesis, antithesis, synthesis; effortless plenty, *energetic particularity*, harmonious integrity" (*Vorlesungen*, I, 357, italics mine).

45 Hegel follows Schelling and A.W. Schlegel on this point. "*Poesie* signifies, in [one] sense, artistic invention in general, the wondrous act whereby nature is enriched by art; as the name expresses, a genuine creation and a bringing forth" (Schlegel, *Vorlesungen*, I, 261). See Schelling, *Philosophy of Art*, 202.

particular craft suited to a particular medium, poetry displays a *poiesis*, a capacity for creativity, *Dichtung*, make-believe in general.⁴⁶ This is why literature is the “universal art” (LFA 89, XIII:123).⁴⁷ The question now is why writerly virtuosity matters so much in the literatures of the late romantic era, from seventeenth-century French and Spanish drama⁴⁸ to the prose of Herder and Schiller (LFA 1010, xv:288) to the poetry of Goethe’s *Divan*.

Poetry and prose

The answer, noted in passing in [chapter 1](#), depends upon a formal distinction between poetry and prose and the historical activation of that distinction in the movement from a naïve to a sentimental literature, from the poetic condition captured variously in Homer and Dante to the prosaic condition that presents itself as an obstacle to the dramatists and poets mentioned above.

Poesie, *Prosa*, and their cognates are among Hegel’s favorite terms, and their meanings can be difficult to pin down. Formally, of course, prose is simply unversified text: writing in which the line is broken arbitrarily (by the margin of the page) rather than intentionally (by the poet, for prosodic effect). The integrity of the line is sacrificed because prose is language as instrument – “a means of bringing the content before our minds” (LFA 1005, xv:280) whether in the interests of “abstract accuracy” (history) or “persuasiveness” (oratory) (LFA 986–93, xv:257–66) – and as instrument has its aim outside of itself. Prose can thus be governed by explicit rules: “unmistakable definiteness, and clear intelligibility” (LFA 1005, xv:280). In prose, particular observations take on significance only insofar as they support the universal claim, but in poetry the mechanical relationship of argument

⁴⁶ Schelling formulates this as a distinction between *Poesie* (“invention in and for itself”) and *Kunst* (*Philosophy of Art*, 89).

⁴⁷ The other arts can exhibit poetic power as well. The genre painter “displays [his] ability by [his] own efforts to create an objective world” (LFA 600, xiv:229). The musical virtuoso “not only evinces an astounding mastery over external material but displays [his] inner unbounded freedom by surpassing [him]self in playing with apparently insurmountable difficulties, running riot with ingenuity, [and] making surprising jokes in a witty mood” (LFA 957, xv:222). What distinguishes poetry is not that it possesses this poetic moment, but that it lacks the technical one.

⁴⁸ Hegel mentions the exuberance of Calderón de la Barca’s imagery at several points (LFA 406, 411, XIII:521, 528), and refers both to the “splendid rhetoric” of Corneille’s *Cid* (LFA 241, XIII:312) and the useless artifice of diction that Voltaire had praised in Racine (LFA 267, XIII:346). For a general comment, see LFA 1010–11, xv:287–8.

to evidence gives way to the more democratic *rappport* of theme and variation: a single “fundamental idea” is granted “rich development of its different aspects” (LFA 983, xv:253), which enjoy in turn some independent standing. (A metaphor can succeed both on its own and in the context of the work.⁴⁹) Like all art, poetry is free, or “independent” (LFA 7, XIII:20), insofar as it obeys a self-legislated law – something like expressive completeness. Where expressive completeness is achieved, poetry “conduct[s] us into a different element” from that made available in prose: namely, “into the *appearance* of the content itself” (LFA 1005, xv:281). Prose offers us the facts, in other words, but poetry offers us an experience of them, a sense of what the facts are like. Thus, “we may describe poetry’s way of putting things as *figurative* [*bildlich*] because it brings before our eyes not the abstract essence but its concrete reality” (LFA 1002, xv:276). Concreteness here suggests particularity and detail, of course, but also a certain immediacy. Like paintings, literary images house a conceptual content, but this is grasped by the reader not inferentially, as in prose, but with the satisfying suddenness of feeling or sensation.

By the time Hegel delivered his lectures, the figurative sense of the term “prosaic” – ordinary or uninspired – was well established in German letters.⁵⁰ Hegel extends and formalizes this figurative sense, making of the word a term of art with reference to a wide range of cultural and historical phenomena. Thus the bucolic *Heroenzeit* had been thoroughly poetic – even the polis was a “political work of art”⁵¹ – while the bourgeois state, ruled by legal, mercantile, and welfare institutions, amounts to the “prose of life”; like prose itself, the shapes of our cities, our economies, and our lives will be determined by ends and forces outside of us. It is no accident, Hegel observes, that “prose begins” “in the slave” (LFA 387, XIII:497). Aesop, whose fables were unversified, was by tradition a bondsman from Phrygia, a region deep in Asia Minor and in Hegel’s view a sort of Netherlands of the ancient world.⁵² The thought is not far from Nietzsche, who enjoys informing

49 Poetry is thus “republican speech,” in Friedrich Schlegel’s phrase (*Philosophical Fragments*, 8; CF 65).

50 Grimm’s *Wörterbuch* lists the phrase “There are thus poetic and prosaic painters,” from Lessing’s *Laokoon*, as the first recorded instance. This figurative sense is not recorded in English until 1813 (*OED*).

51 This is the title Hegel gives to Section II, Chapter III of “The Greek World” (LPH 250).

52 “[A] land where the concept was not yet immanent in its form, and where in general the prose of life ruled” (1820, Ms. 84).

us that Aesop was the only poet Socrates, the true founder of the slave revolt, could enjoy.⁵³

At the back of Hegel's effort to historicize the formal shift from verse to prose are the great eighteenth-century debates on the origin of language. Once a salvo of the counter-Enlightenment – Hamann had called poetry “the native language of mankind”⁵⁴ – the notion that prose derives from an originally poetic language had become a dogma well before Hegel recorded it in his lectures.⁵⁵ In his hands, however, the view is not so naïve as it may first appear. Hegel's interest is not in the origin of language as such – does not involve anthropological speculation, that is, on the first production of meaningful noise – but rather in the origin of language as a medium of reflective self-expression (LFA 973–4, xv:240–2). With this in view, it seems worth taking seriously, as Hegel does, the fact that the earliest reflective uses of language – he cites the Norse and Hindu epics and the philosophy of Parmenides (LFA 1042, xv:328) – are not paraphrased but versified.

In this early phase of literacy, a poet can be fully at home in his language, for it is he who has invented that language, as Homer founded Greek or Dante fashioned Italian from his Tuscan dialect (1826a, Ms. 380). Naïve poets do not labor to translate their images into words; as the hero establishes the limits of action, the poet establishes the bounds of expression. It is perhaps tempting to point to this effortless fluency as an instance of that formal virtuosity we saw above in cases of musical and painterly skill. But virtuosity requires an intimation of difficulty if its fluency is to be read as effortlessness, and this difficulty is not sensed by the audience as such when the artist is the inventor of his own medium. (We are not even sure what the traps and obstacles are as yet.) Homer's verse is thus “necessarily simple, not at war, not polemical ... It is not habit, but creation itself, *poiein*” (1826a, Ms. 379). It is only much later that the poietic power implicit in all great literature will appear as such – or, rather, succeed as such. Already in Roman

53 *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. R. Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 68.

54 Cited at Kai Hammermeister, *The German Aesthetic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 225. Rousseau and Herder shared the view as well, which is often said to have originated with Vico.

55 “It is true, what has so often been said: poetry [*Poesie*] existed before prose” (Schlegel, *Vorlesungen*, II, 281). For Schelling, “Language in general = the artistic impulse in human beings” (*Philosophy of Art*, 102). The doctrine has a long history through Emerson – “every word was once a poem” – Nietzsche, and Heidegger.

literature, in Virgil and Horace, we find a corruption of Homeric simplicity and a will toward “something artificial, deliberately manufactured” (LFA 1010, xv:287; cf. 1826b, Ms. 81).

As the religious and philosophical views of the first literate cultures betray their parochialism and inadequacy, they are replaced by more sophisticated and cosmopolitan views and poetry cedes its grip on language. It is in Rome that this shift takes place most decisively because Rome is an empire and an empire is essentially a bureaucracy. After the interruption of the dark and middle ages, the culmination of which is *The Divine Comedy*, prose regains its ascendancy in the early modern period, in Luther and Descartes, leading to the establishment of prose as the lingua franca of the spirit and to poetry’s effective relegation, in the illuminated century, to entertainment and moral instruction. With the exception of Sterne and a few painters and composers, Hegel’s opinion of European art between 1700 and 1775 is decidedly low: “The period of the Enlightened intellect, it is true, did also practice art,” Hegel notes, “but in a very prosaic way” (LFA 507, xiv:114).

The fact of obsolescence is what the post-romantic poet inherits. “[A]t a time when the mere accuracy of the prosaic way of putting things has already become the ordinary rule,” insofar as “the prevailing attitude of mind is the separation of feeling and vision from ... intellectual thinking,” “then poetry has a more difficult position even in respect of its figurativeness” (LFA 1005–6, xv:281). It is not only that the public takes works of literature less seriously, in other words; the very resources of the poet – metaphor, image, and simile – have come to seem frivolous and juvenile. The naïve poet was “not confronted with prose as an independent field of internal and external existence, a field that it had first to overcome.” Instead,

[i]ts task was restricted rather to merely deepening the meanings and clarifying the forms of other modes of consciousness. If, on the other hand, prose has already drawn into its mode of treatment the entire contents of the spirit and impressed the seal of that treatment on anything and everything, poetry has to undertake the work of completely recasting and remodeling and sees itself involved on every side in numerous difficulties because of the inflexibility of prose. For not only does it have to tear itself free from adherence to the ordinary contemplation of indifferent and accidental things ... but it must also in all these tasks transform the prosaic consciousness’s ordinary mode of expression into a poetic one. (LFA 977, xv:245)

What is called for here is a sort of Reformation of language, a return to first principles – a fundamentalism – that is in practice radical, disruptive, and thoroughly modern. “The language of the poet must announce that it is not meant in the same way as ordinary language, i.e., as the contingency of this or that notion [*Einfall*],” Hegel announces in his lectures (1826a, Ms. 381–2), and in Hotho we read that the poetry of a prosaic age “needs a more deliberate energy in order to work its way out of the mind’s habitual abstractness and into a concrete liveliness [*Lebendigkeit*]” (LFA 1006, xv:282).

There are other ways to undermine the monosemy and transparency of prose, and Hegel does not appreciate all of them. “[A]nother language must necessarily emerge, one that is suited to the prosaic but easily distinguishable from it: thus the Metaphoric arrives” (1826b, Ms. 81). Hegel tends to privilege the anti-naturalism of bold and vivid figures of speech, the sort of comedy or carnival of language one finds in Sterne or Joyce; he is less sympathetic to experiments in the tragic mode – the aposiopesis and broken forms of Hölderlin, say, or the branching ironies of Kleist. Nonetheless, this is a carnival with an agenda: in modern literature, he says, in what is perhaps the most strikingly anti-classical line in all the lectures, “Language must appear as negativity.” And again: “in modern authors, the struggle of the intentional, or the content, and the expression presents itself, presents this theoretical unrest as the unrest of the poem itself” (1826b, Ms. 81).

Hegel’s proximity to the Russian Formalists, whose work on narratology and figurative language yielded a seminal account of literary modernism, is absolutely striking here. In daily life, Shklovsky writes in the *Theory of Prose*, “the object passes before us as if it were prepackaged.” This is “the perceptual character of the prose world” in general, the result of which is that “life fades into nothingness. Automatization eats away at things, at clothes, at furniture, at our wives, and at our fear of war.” Art interrupts this erosion, in Shklovsky’s famous phrase, by a process of *ostranenie* – defamiliarization or estrangement – that “makes perception long and ‘laborious.’” “The perceptual process in art has a purpose all its own,” he continues, “and ought to be extended to the fullest. *Art is a means of experiencing the process of creativity. The artifact itself is quite unimportant.*” At the same time, art’s aim is “to lead us to a knowledge of a thing through the organ of sight instead of recognition,” to “make us feel objects, to make a stone stony.”⁵⁶ The elements

⁵⁶ Viktor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose* (Elmwood Park, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990), 6, 5;

of Hegel's theory of figurative language are all here: metaphor is the act of estrangement;⁵⁷ estrangement leads to a reflection on the act of creativity, the raw power of *Phantasie*; but the display is not merely one of virtuosity, for the defamiliarization of the object (a trivial object: a stone) allows us to see and feel it anew, in its liveliness.

These simple but powerful insights into the situation of the modern arts – as noted, the usurpation of poetry by prose can be extended to that of the image by the photograph or the performance by the recording – ground a history of the avant-garde from its birth in Jena in the 1790s to each successive phase and slogan of modernism. It even calls to mind the radical style of philosophic prose that Hegel developed, probably under Hölderlin's influence, in the period leading up to the publication of the *Phenomenology*.⁵⁸ At the turn of the century, Wordsworth had famously rejected sophistication in his verse and had striven to introduce into his lyric poems the inflections of natural speech – a decision that was to have profound, even proto-modernist consequences. And yet Wordsworth's struggle is largely with eighteenth-century English verse. Hegel, far more radically, sets modern poetry against prose as such, against the entire drift of modern life and thought.⁵⁹ What is equally distinctive of a Hegelian theory of modernism is that the negativity of the form – the metaphoricity of the language, the liberation of music from text, the liberation of

italics in original. James Wood discusses the Formalists' interest in "extravagant metaphors," examples of which he finds in Nabokov, in *How Fiction Works* (New York: FSG, 2008), 26n. Shklovsky is more radical than Hegel in that he sees defamiliarization as the purpose of form in general; indeed, as a formalist he is at points much closer to Kant than to Hegel.

57 Shklovsky, referring to figurative language as the "poetic image," agreed (*Theory of Prose*, 3), though he considers narratological tactics as well.

58 According to Pinkard, having decided to move to Jena to pursue studies in philosophy, Hegel "abandoned the free-flowing prose style he had chosen in his earlier writings ... like Hölderlin, framing his thoughts in a kind of unrelenting style that refused to allow the reader to fall back on his own familiar use of language" (*Hegel: A Biography* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000], 87).

59 Hegel may have drawn inspiration for this argument from Jean Paul. In a section of the *Vorschule* entitled "Notwendigkeit der witzigen Bildung" he addresses the German nation as follows: "But heavens! what games we could win if we could only *castle* with our monastic ideas! New ideas absolutely require *free* ones and these in turn *equal* ones. Only wit gives us freedom, by giving equality first; it is for the spirit what fire and water are for chemistry: *chemica non agunt nisi soluta*. (That is, only fluidity gives the freedom for new formation – or only unbound bodies can create new ones.)" (*Horn*, 142; *Vorschule*, §54). Jean Paul is himself playing off F. Schlegel's notion that "Understanding is mechanical, wit is chemical, genius is organic spirit" (*Philosophical Fragments*, 75; AF 366).

painting into abstraction – is not the whole of the achievement, as in doctrinaire Romantic irony, but rather a moment in that whole, a rip in the crust of prose that makes possible once again a dynamic and self-sufficient, a “living” relationship between the poet and her world. “The sense and aim of metaphorical diction in general ... must be found in the need and power of spirit and heart which are not content with the simple, customary, and plain, but place themselves above it,” not in order simply to pervert and derange it, as in Schlegel or Jean Paul, but to “escape from the commonplace” and “move on to something else” (LFA 407, 406, XIII:522, 521): namely, to “tak[ing] speculative thinking into the imagination and giv[ing] it a body as it were within the spirit itself” (LFA 977, XV:245).

Hegel could not be more explicit about the need for bold experimentation in modern literature; nor could he be more acutely aware of the risks involved, particularly the risk of artifice. It is a commonplace, though a persuasive one, that works of art ought not to call attention to the stratagems by which they generate their effects. As Aristotle observes in the *Rhetoric*, “a writer must disguise his art and give the impression of speaking naturally and not artificially; naturalness is persuasive, artificiality is the contrary.” The reason for this is that, sensing artifice, “our hearers are prejudiced and think we have some design against them, as if we were mixing their wines for them.”⁶⁰ Though Aristotle is speaking here of oratory, not poetry, the same point is often made in writing on the arts. “One should have wit, but not want to have it,” Friedrich Schlegel quips, as if the betrayal of a desire might corrupt the possession itself.⁶¹ Kant, first and foremost, held that art should imitate naturalness, if not nature itself.⁶² Genius is simply the capacity to create undeliberately, or naïvely.⁶³ Hegel affirms this dogma over and over in his lectures on art: “circumspect

60 *Rhetoric*, Book III.

61 *Philosophical Fragments*, 22; AF 32.

62 The latter claim awaits a later, perhaps American Romanticism: for Emerson, “the poet’s fidelity to his office” is “insure[d]” by “the beauty of things,” i.e. the natural world. “The Poet” in C. Bode, ed., *The Portable Emerson* (Viking: New York, 1981), 247.

63 Kant’s concern is not so much the risk of fraudulence, I think, as the fact that a discernible artistic strategy or intention is likely to corrupt the free play in the mind of the viewer by introducing into its reflection on the object the notion of a causal relationship that can be firmly grasped and subsumed beneath concepts of the understanding. This worry may be at work in Hegel’s thinking, too, though he does not make the point explicitly.

composition must never fail to give the impression of naïveté” (LFA 1011, xv:289), for every poetical work is “a perfect circle without any apparent intention” (LFA 996, xv:270), and “a self-conscious and regulated art impairs the true effect which must appear to be and be unintentional and artless” (LFA 1010, xv:287). But Hegel acknowledges the inevitable necessity with which the modern poet must break this rule, must abandon Homeric naïveté for the artificial, the “deliberate” energies of imagination and wit. Perhaps the most comical effort to resist the rule of prose is the French taste for circumlocution.⁶⁴ But, in general, “now that the poetic and prosaic ways of putting things and looking at the world are bound together in the consciousness of one and the same individual, both these ways may possibly restrict and disturb and even fight one another – a dispute that it takes supreme genius to assuage, as witness our contemporary poetry” (LFA 1006, xv:282). There will be only a handful of poets capable of an artifice that does not become artificial. Goethe will be among them, thanks in part, as we will see in [chapter 5](#), to Hafiz.

The energy modern writers must summon is of course none other than the *Kraft* of imagination or the striking catachreses of wit. Such displays clearly differ, moreover, from the reconciling forms of virtuosity, those expressing the sense of being at home in a medium, that we encountered in drawing and musical performance. Since literature is not a craft in which a material medium must be overcome, the function of virtuosity is exclusively negative here, serving to demonstrate the poet’s freedom from habit and convention. But if the use of wit and imagination fails to embody a reconciled opposition as such, it participates in a more ambitious and important project. “[G]enuinely lyric poetry, as *art*, [i] tears itself free from this already existent world of prose,” Hotho records, “and out of an imagination now become subjectively independent [ii] creates a new poetic world of subjective meditation and feeling whereby alone it generates in a living way [*legendig erzeugt*] the true contents of the inner life of man and the true way of expressing them” (LFA 1127, xv:437).⁶⁵ Hegel is remarkably

64 “No poet might use the word *cochon* or speak of spoons and forks and a thousand other things. Hence the prolix definitions and circumlocutions: e.g. instead of ‘spoon’ or ‘fork,’ ‘an instrument wherewith liquid or solid food is brought to the mouth,’ and more of the same kind” (LFA 267, XIII:346).

65 See also the passage cited in [chapter 1](#): “[I]f it attains its aim, not only is [poetry] liberated from that separation between thinking, which is concentrated on the universal, and feeling and vision, which seize on the individual, but it also at the same time frees these latter forms of consciousness and their content and objects from

close here to the theory of modernist literary practice developed by the Russian Formalists.

The fable: wit and prose

We have considered examples of virtuosity in both its positive and its negative forms. In what remains of this chapter, I offer excurses on two literary forms, the fable and figurative language, in which wit and imagination are centrally employed.

The fable was a topic of some interest in the aesthetic tradition of Hegel's day. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm had published their collection in 1812 and Romantic writers (Tieck in particular) drew on these resources in their tales. The form had been given a persuasive new interpretation in the mid-eighteenth century by Lessing, who had criticized La Fontaine's notion of the fable as a mere amusement and proposed to read it instead as a moral tale populated by animals.⁶⁶ Lessing's account was certainly influential: this is how dictionaries define the fable today.⁶⁷ Hegel, however, disliked Lessing's proposal and spends a surprising amount of time in the lectures explaining why this is so. It is not that he thinks highly of the fable as a literary form. Nor is the subject of particular historical interest: as he acknowledges, we can only attribute one or two fables to Aesop himself. What piques Hegel is Lessing's "enlightened" account of value in the arts. It is anachronistic to attribute an interest in moral instruction to a classical genre, Hegel thinks, since such calculation and instrumentality belong only to the post-classical world of bureaucratic Rome. Lessing's account exhibits the paradigmatic one-sidedness of Enlightenment thought: in an effort to avoid the reduction of art to entertainment, he insists too heavily on art as instruction and thus fails to see that the very thing that makes the fable enjoyable is also what makes it valuable.

their servitude to thinking and conducts them victoriously to reconciliation with the universality of thought" (LFA 1006, xv:282).

66 In "Abhandlungen über die Fabel," Lessing defines it thus: "Wenn wir einen allgemeinen moralischen Satz auf einen besonderen Fall zurückführen, diesem besonderen Fall die Wirklichkeit erteilen, und eine Geschichte daraus dichten, in welcher man den allgemeinen Satz anschauend erkennt, so heißt diese Erdichtung eine Fabel" (*Sämtliche Schriften*, ed. Karl Lachmann and Franz Muncker, 3rd edn. [Stuttgart: G.J. Göschen, 1886–1924], vol. VII, 446).

67 Pillow attributes Lessing's view to Hegel (*Sublime Understanding*, 206) as does K.D. Magnus (*Hegel and the Symbolic Mediation of Spirit* [Albany: SUNY Press, 2001], 55).

Lessing's emphasis on the moral of the fable leads him to exaggerate the role of animals, Hegel notes, since animals are best able to stand in for the features of temperament – the fox's slyness, for instance – that the moralist is interested in. (As a matter of fact, Hegel observes, fables can star plants as well, as in the story of the reed and the oak.) The more serious point, he thinks, is that modern fabulists (Pfeffel, Lessing) are so intent on the moral that they get the details of animal behavior wrong (1820, Ms. 85). Thus one story tells of a hamster that unwisely fails to gather enough nuts. But this is absurd, Hegel objects: "there are no hamsters that wouldn't gather" (1823, Ms. 132; LFA 387, XIII:498). In this moment, the contrivance of the whole affair emerges: the reader realizes that the author's intent is simply instruction. But there is no art here, no surprise or delight: "Pious people can draw a moral or upbuilding lesson from anything," Hegel observes dryly (1826a, Ms. 180). It is an eccentric but winning bit of criticism and a fine example of his attention to the play of content and form.

The observation that "a fable has merit when the phenomenon is true to nature" (1823, Ms. 133) leads to a second: Aesop's tales derive their value not from the sheer fancy of their maker, but from quick, canny observations of the natural environment. In strong winds, Aesop relates, a reed will bend while an oak will break. Such an observation remains true to nature while "immediately" (1820, Ms. 84) suggesting a perspicuous moral (great men are shattered by tragedy [1826a, Ms. 178]). But why do either of these matter? Taken individually, they don't: we are interested in fables no more for their ethics than their ethology. What pleases us is rather "tradesmen's ethics and wit," Hegel observes. "It is not free literature, a true work of art, but is rather the low, the witty business of drawing . . . some sort of lesson from a natural relationship" (1826a, Ms. 177–8; cf. 184). What we enjoy is not a fact or a truth, but an act of wit: the surprising, satisfying match between disparate things.⁶⁸

Like figurative language, then, a good fable can display nimbleness of mind. But unlike the allegory or the metaphor – comparisons that "start from the meaning" and are thus given over to contrivance and artifice – the fable "start[s] from the external object" (LFA 395, 381,

68 We often see this agility on display in *Moby-Dick*, in which Melville remains true to the facts of work – flensing, hoisting, "trying out" the blubber – while using these episodes as points of speculative departure, as in Chapter 89, "Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish."

xiii:507, 490). That is, it is grounded in objective facts about, say, reeds and oaks. The fable's charm thus lies in its ability to give ordinary life a lift without abandoning it to fancy, on the one hand, or sermonizing on the other. This is not to say that fables are or can be great works of art. They are "prosaic," in Hegel's view, in all three relevant senses of the term: unversified; drawn from common life; unable to join content and form. (In fact, as noted above, the fable is not just prosaic but the origin, in Aesop, of prose itself.) Like the genre picture, the fable and the parable start from what is close to hand. Where this is humdrum and contingent, as in much modern experience, the spontaneity of these forms offers a release. Thus "Goethe's parables, like his poems written in the manner of fables, often have a jocular [*spaßhaft*] tone through which he wrote his soul free from the annoyances [*das Verdrießliche*] of life" (LFA 392, xiii:503). Though it lacks its air of reconciliation, the fable thus anticipates objective humor in its playful take on contingency; and it is for this reason, perhaps, that Hegel engages Lessing in debate.⁶⁹

Metaphor, image, and simile

Sorting out Hegel's account of figurative language, the trio of devices he calls *Metapher*, *Bild*, and *Vergleichung*, can be a difficult business.⁷⁰ Hegel is familiar with the traditional Aristotelian distinction between figures employing and not employing "like" or "as", but it plays almost no role in his discussion. By simile he really means epic or Homeric

69 This distinction between a subjective wit, based in imaginative fantasy, and a more objective wit that departs from established facts is perhaps one way to distinguish animations of the past from animations of the present. It is striking to note how little the members of the Disney and Looney Tunes gangs have to do with their particular animal natures. Mickey does not behave much like a mouse, nor Donald all that much like a duck. (How does a duck behave?) By contrast, the great popularity of movies like *Finding Nemo* and *Ice Age* had much to do, I would guess, with their creators' success in imagining the lives of fish and sharks, or the mammals of the Pleistocene. It would make sense, on Hegel's view, for the Looney Tunes material to appeal to those at a lower stage of spiritual development: i.e. children. Meanwhile, it is now a commonplace that films like *Finding Nemo* are ones that parents can enjoy as well.

70 Hegel acknowledges the difficulty of treating with speculative clarity forms like fable, riddle, allegory, metaphor, and simile; they are conceptually muddled ("hybrid forms [*Zwitterarten*]") and subordinate, accordingly, as works of art (LFA 381–2, xiii:490–1). The position of the discussion is also curious given that the previous chapters had treated historical periods (Persian, Indian, Egyptian art). "Dies Sphäre ist nur uneigentlich ein Symbolisches. Es ist das dritte allerdings zu den beiden ersten Sphären" (1823, Ms. 130).

simile. And what interests him is a distinction between comparatively simple figures that function with the immediacy of metonymy (“metaphors”) and more complex figures that encourage reflection and interpretation (“images” and “similes”). Hegel has been charged by readers sympathetic to what I will define below as the interactionist understanding of metaphor with failing to appreciate its complexity and open-endedness,⁷¹ and it is true that Hegel is comparatively dismissive of the figure he calls metaphor.⁷² But the suggestion that Hegel underplays the force and significance of figurative language in general is quite wrong.⁷³ In the first place, we will see, metaphor provides that display of negative virtuosity, that resistance to the world of prose discussed above in the context of Shklovskian estrangement. Moreover, the image and the simile will prove essential to the possibility of a poetic absorption in the materials of daily life that, as I noted at the outset of this chapter, constitutes a valuable parallel to the account of painterly self-investment introduced in [chapter 2](#), and that will play a role in the account of the poetry of objective humor to which we turn in [chapter 5](#). The details of the account may prove thornier and more involved than is strictly necessary. In particular, I will return to the lecture transcripts to argue that the account of the simile’s imaginative power changes significantly from 1823 to 1826. The point is worth our attention both because it shows Hegel in the process of developing a conceptual vocabulary with which to express the distinctive achievement of the Sufi poets (Hafiz) and their modern revivalist (Goethe), and because it focuses our attention on that achievement itself: namely, the reanimation of the everyday in the artist’s gift of her own vitality.

71 Peter Szondi, for one, finds the discussion of literary figures “truly shallow,” “one of the least inspired sections in the entire work” (*Poetik und Geschichtsphilosophie I* [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974], 395, 390). Paul de Man, who cites this line, appears not to disagree (“Sign and Symbol in Hegel’s Aesthetics” in *Aesthetic Ideology* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996], 95). De Man has nothing to say about metaphor and simile; his aim is to deconstruct Hegel’s distinction between sign and symbol in the *Encyclopedia* (PM §§459–62).

72 This may have to do with a wish to distinguish himself from the Romantics. “Metaphor,” A.W. Schlegel writes, “is for poetry the most beautiful and the most important sort of trope” (*Vorlesungen*, I, 291).

73 The one substantial treatment of this topic in English with which I am familiar is K.D. Magnus (*Hegel and the Symbolic Mediation of Spirit*, 60–9). Her concern is principally to defend Hegel from the charge (Derrida’s, in “White Mythology”) that he ignores the ambiguity and suggestiveness of figurative language. More generally, she wishes to emphasize the importance of symbolic art as such to Hegel’s aesthetic theory.

A sketch of the current state of the debate on metaphor will provide a framework against which Hegel's effort may be measured. Over the course of the past century, this debate has comprised four principal views. The first two of these lay claim to either side of the basic tension between definiteness and indefiniteness. On the one hand, metaphors are clearly meaningful, and a successful metaphor can be singularly apt; on the other hand, there is its open-endedness and often patent ambiguity.⁷⁴ This initial pair of approaches then led, a generation later, to a pair of refinements.

(1) The view that first departs from the determinacy of metaphoric meaning is the comparison theory. In its most influential version, this is the view that metaphors are elliptical similes, and that a metaphor's meaning can be spelled out, more or less, by adding "like" or "as."⁷⁵ Following a tradition with roots in the *Poetics*, the relationship of comparison may be further articulated as an implicit analogy.⁷⁶ (2) The competing first-generation view is known as the interaction theory. Interactionists, with their roots in the New Criticism, reject the comparison theory as crass and mechanical.⁷⁷ Treating metaphors as similes may produce a set of likenesses between two terms, but a list is not yet an interpretation (which would involve weighing, ranking, and so forth). In fact, though, the problem is not the hermeneutic inadequacy of comparison, but inadequacy as such. Any suggestion that a metaphor's meaning can be paraphrased is, in Cleanth Brooks's coinage, heretical. On the radically holistic view of the interactionists – cousin to Romantic metaphysics⁷⁸ – metaphor has a primitive integrity of meaning that interpretation cannot help but spoil.

74 Though he puts it in different language, I borrow this way of framing the debate from Richard Moran ("Metaphor" in B. Hale and C. Wright, eds., *A Companion to the Philosophy of Language* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1999], 248–70). Moran uses it to distinguish Davidson and Searle; he does not extend it to the comparison and interaction theories. Note: the claim is not that metaphor exhibits a tension between fixed and open meanings in a way that ordinary language does not; it simply does so to a heightened degree.

75 This remains a popular view. See, e.g., Karol Berger, *A Theory of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 219.

76 To say that, e.g., the sky is crying is to imply that tears are to weepers as rain is to the heavens. See *Poetics*, 1457a.

77 Black and E.F. Kittay are the most frequently cited representatives of this view, originally suggested by I.A. Richards.

78 That is, the Hölderlinian-Schellingian view that Judgment presupposes Being. See Hölderlin, "Judgment and Being" in Thomas Pfau, ed. and trans., *Friedrich Hölderlin: Essays and Letters on Theory* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), 37–8.

In the 1970s, these two orientations to the problem of metaphor were reprised and significantly reformulated. (3) Though John Searle repudiates predecessors, his speech-act theory is best understood as an effort to rehabilitate the comparison theory by refining it and repositioning it within a broader theory of language. A metaphor in his view is an expression of the form *S is P* that is taken to mean, metaphorically, *S is R*. *R* is not a special metaphoric entity; it is just what Grice called speaker meaning. (Thus, when Hamlet asks if he should “take arms against a sea of troubles,” we understand this to mean something like “actively confront his problems.”) If we can make sense of the speaker’s meaning in paradigmatic cases of metaphor, Searle observes, then paraphrase cannot be a heresy. What else can it be to have grasped the speaker’s meaning?⁷⁹ Of course, not everything in metaphor admits of paraphrase. For “in metaphorical utterances,” Searle observes, “we do more than just state that *S is R* . . . we state that *S is R* by way of going through the meaning of ‘*S is P*.’”⁸⁰ And the friction of this interaction can yield surprising and unlimited results. Searle’s suggestion is thus that metaphors have something like a denotation or referent, a narrower and more definite meaning, and on the other hand something like a connotation, a penumbra of related senses. Thus, for instance, the fact that Hamlet imagines confronting his troubles as drawing a sword against a body of water suggests all sorts of interesting possibilities – chiefly, a sense of the futility of the enterprise. A further question is whether he intends this sense of futility or is surprised by it in attempting to muster a suitably heroic image. These are the sorts of shadowy possibilities, crucial to the excellence of a metaphor but not to its possibility to mean something in the first place, that Searle thinks a philosophy of language is not responsible for. A theory of metaphor, on his view, is responsible for explaining only the first, narrow meaning, not the latter, broader one. (It was the failure to draw this distinction that had led the New Critics to object to paraphrase. But if a paraphrase is simply a statement of what *R* is, there is no problem.) The notion of similarity “obviously plays a major role,” Searle thinks, in explaining how metaphors fix their primary meaning; in all, however, eight mechanisms, or “principles,” are required.

79 Searle, “Metaphor” in A.P. Martinich, ed., *Philosophy of Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 428.

80 “It is in this sense that we feel that metaphors somehow are intrinsically not paraphrasable” (ibid.).

(4) Davidson, who defends the noncognitivist thesis that metaphors mean nothing at all, does not appear at first glance an ally of the interactionists (who argued that metaphor has an ineffable, and thus special, sort of meaning). Still, Davidson's deeper motivation is a wish to accommodate the interactionist insight into the indeterminacy and open-endedness of metaphor. On Searle's view, the passage from "*S* is *P*" to "*S* is *R*" is guided by a (tacit) set of principles. But Davidson rejects the view that *R* is ever really fixed. Metaphors are not interpreted or understood; they are simply responded to, like jokes or pictures, and we are "bullied into" doing so.⁸¹ Because responding to a metaphor is not a discursively mediated affair, there is no bound on what is an acceptable response, no "limit to what a metaphor brings to our attention."⁸² Interactionism grasped this basic openness to response; it simply erred in speaking of a meaning.

Hegel's own view is that metaphors do possess meanings – i.e. referents – that these are "given immediately," and that they are given "by the context" (1820, Ms. 89). Where does this belong among the four views just surveyed? Not with the interactionists, whose talk of non-propositional meanings suggests an orientation toward the sublime,⁸³ and whose view of paraphrase Hegel sharply rejects. Literature can be "translated into other languages," and "turned from poetry to prose," in his view, "without essential detriment to its value" (LFA 964, xv:229).⁸⁴ (The consequence of this view would appear to be that literary works

81 Davidson, "What Metaphors Mean," reprinted in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 256.

82 Ibid., 263. It is on these grounds that Davidson rejects the notion of metaphoric meaning as such, i.e. "the thesis that associated with a metaphor is a cognitive content that its author wishes to convey and that the interpreter must grasp if he is to get the message" (262).

83 Pillow, who is sympathetic to the view, makes this point as well (*Sublime Understanding*, 254–63).

84 Stephen Bungay usefully relates this to a rather remarkable statement of Goethe's on the subject of paraphrase: "I have respect for rhythm as for rhyme," the poet observes in his autobiography, "for they are what makes poetry poetry, but what has a really substantial effect, what educates and improves, is what is left of a poet when he is translated into prose." *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Part Three, Book XI (Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke*, x:540), cited at Bungay, *Beauty and Truth: A Study of Hegel's Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 143. Goethe meant it. In their conversation of January 3, 1830, Eckermann reports the following comment, apropos of a new French prose translation of *Faust*: "I do not like to read my *Faust* in German any more; but in this French translation all seems again fresh, new, and spirited." Schiller, in "Naïve and Sentimental Poetry," rejects the heresy of paraphrase – "Even the difference in languages and ages alters nothing here" (*Essays*, 204) – but only with regard to naïve poetry.

consist not of sentences in a language but of Fregean propositions. Whether Hegel is committed to this view is unclear; the point he is trying to make in the cited passage is that literature's native medium is not language but the imagination.) Hegel's emphasis on immediacy suggests a kinship with Davidson's account. (Both, for instance, invoke an analogy to pictorial representation.⁸⁵) But the resemblance is misleading. While Davidson takes the lack of conceptual mediation as an obstacle to the establishment of a single meaning, Hegel takes it to suggest the self-evidence of that single meaning. On the whole, Hegel's view is closest to Searle's. Like Searle, he acknowledges the comparison theorist's emphasis on the mechanism of similarity⁸⁶ while taking a broader view of the utterance's "context" in establishing its reference. But like Searle as well, he is able to account for the open-endedness of figurative language. What is open-ended, on his view, are images and similes.

Let's look at the details of the account. Hegel's description of metaphor as a "contracted simile [*ins Kurze gezogenes Vergleichung*]"⁸⁷ can be misleading if we take it, as some commentators have, as an endorsement of Aristotle's definition. Hegel alludes offhandedly to this definition – "Achilles is a lion" versus "Achilles is like a lion" (1826a, Ms. 189) – but he does so not because he takes it particularly seriously (his own examples violate it, as we will see) but because he wants to note that Aristotle's account is roughly in line with his own account, the center of which is the distinction between the *compression* of metaphor, the fact that it is missing something, and the *redundancy* of simile, the fact that it offers more than it must.⁸⁸ Hegel sets up his account with a distinction between literal and figurative senses, "the expression [*Ausdruck*]" (taking arms against a sea) and the "reference [*Bedeutung*]" (confronting one's problems). A metaphor is a figure in which the

85 Hegel's reference to metaphor as "das Bildliche als solches" (1826b, Ms. 40a) suggests he sees the comparison Davidson draws between understanding a metaphor and understanding a picture.

86 We make the jump from the *Ausdruck* to the *Bedeutung* when the "substance" of the second term "has similarity with the first" (1826a, Ms. 189).

87 In the Griesheim manuscript of the 1826 lectures, cited by Gethmann-Siebert at 1826a, 271n192; in the Kehler manuscript the term is the comparable "*Gleichnis*" (1826a, Ms. 188).

88 A.W. Schlegel, who notes that metaphor involves "identification" while simile involves only "comparison," does follow Aristotle (*Vorlesungen*, I, 291). Schlegel also distinguishes between simile (*Vergleichung*) and extended similes (*Gleichniß*) of the sort found in Homer, perhaps anticipating Hegel's notion of *Bild*.

referent is not given explicitly but is instead “presented through” the expression (1820, Ms. 88). In the phrase “my sword devours [*frisst*] the lion’s brain,” the expression is “devours” and the meaning we infer is something like “slices open and destroys” (LFA 405, XIII:519). The standard cases of metaphor studied by interactionists like Max Black take the form *X is Y*: “Men are wolves,” “Juliet is the sun,” and so on. But Hegel would call this figure an image, not a metaphor; the latter would in his terminology take the form “Juliet shines” or “the shining Juliet.”⁸⁹ We will see the difference this makes in a moment. For now, note that what is compressed or “contracted” here is not the word “like” or “as,” but the implicit comparison between the sword and a devouring beast. In the case of the image and simile (*X is Y*, *X is like Y*) that comparison becomes explicit, and the interpretive activity in question becomes something else entirely.

Hegel’s paradigm of the image is in fact not a copulative like “Juliet is the sun,” but a poem like Goethe’s “Mohammed’s Song.” The poem offers a varied description of a mountain stream, and it is the title alone that forces us to relate this account to the life of the Prophet (1826b, Ms. 41; LFA 409, XIII:524). The *Bild* is thus a figure of the form *X, Y* where *X* is relatively abstract⁹⁰ and *Y* relatively differentiated and complex.⁹¹ It is this complexity that distinguishes the image from the metaphor, whose meaning, recall, was established “immediately” by its context. The point here for Hegel is that the reader engages with a metaphor relatively briefly: it interrupts the flow of literal language, but this interruption is immediately resolved once the *Bedeutung* is arrived at. The metaphor thus preserves something of the structure of the riddle. In the image, by contrast, the *Bedeutung* is already given; this forces the reader to do open-ended interpretive work, to figure

89 A metaphor takes the form *X does a* or *X a’s* or *the a-ing X* (where *a-ing* is characteristic of *Y*). Thus when Calderón writes that “the waves sigh under the heavy burden of the ships” (1826a, Ms. 189; LFA 405, XIII:519), we understand the phrase “the waves sigh” as “the waves softly rise and fall” because “softly rising and falling” belongs both to waves and to people carrying burdens. An image, by contrast, would take the form *X is Y* (in virtue of the fact that both *X* and *Y* tend to do *a*). In this case, the image might be something like “The waves are beasts of burden.”

90 It is “nicht für sich ausgedrückt” (1826b, Ms. 41).

91 Another example is Schiller’s distich “Erwartung und Erfüllung”: “In den Ocean schiffet mit tausend Masten der Jüngling; / Still, auf gerettetem Boot, treibt in den Hafen der Greis” (1820, Ms. 91) (The youth navigates the ocean with a thousand masts / The old man drifts in the harbor in a salvaged boat). Again we have an abstract *Bedeutung* (“anticipation,” or youth) paired with a more concrete *Bild* (sailing a thousand ships).

out the ways in which the two sides, prophet and stream, can be seen to resemble one another. A final feature of Hegel's unusual view of metaphor needs to be mentioned. Again, modern discussions that take for their paradigms cases like "Juliet is the sun" tend to treat metaphors in isolation. (Indeed, they are "minor works of art," Danto suggests.⁹²) But on Hegel's quite plausible view, it is an error to take metaphors out of the contexts that are required not only to fix their meanings but to identify them as metaphors in the first place. The consequence of the context-dependence of metaphor is that Hegel tends not to discuss particular metaphors but *das Metaphorische* itself (LFA 408, XIII:518), in particular the metaphorical style he finds prevalent in Persian poetry, seventeenth-century drama (Shakespeare, Calderòn), and contemporary humor (Jean Paul).⁹³

We can now see several reasons for the fact that Hegel's account of metaphor has not been well received. Not only does he identify its *Bedeutung* with Gricean speaker-meaning alone; the notion that this meaning is "immediately" grasped seems to rule out the cloud of connotations emphasized by interactionists and readily acknowledged by Searle. There are several things to say here. The first is that Hegel does of course acknowledge the open-endedness of figurative language; it's just that he attributes this not to metaphor but to the *image*. Hegel's notion of metaphor is perhaps naïve in one respect: considering the examples he offers, he seems to think that semantic complexity emerges only from verbal complexity and variety. In other words, he overlooks the nuance already implicit in a metaphor like "taking arms against a sea of troubles" or, to take his own example, "my sword devours the lion's brain." (What makes this a good metaphor is of course its neat inversion: devouring, *Fressen*, is just what the lion wanted to do to us.⁹⁴) One reason he does not pause to unfold

92 *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 189; cited at Bernstein, "Freedom from Nature? Post-Hegelian Reflections on the End(s) of Art" in S. Houlgate, ed., *Hegel and the Arts* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 221.

93 "[S]ince the sense so figured is clear only from the context, the meaning expressed in metaphor cannot claim the value of an independent artistic expression but only of an incidental one" (LFA 404, XIII:517–18). The image is distinguished by "the *self-sufficiency*" of "the different spheres whence the meaning and its image are drawn" (LFA 408, XIII:524; italics in the original); self-sufficiency is likewise predicated of the simile (LFA 410, XIII:526).

94 Hegel had perhaps not discovered close reading, the New Critical practice of seeking figurative complexity not only where it announces itself, as in "Mohammed's Song," but where it does not. The New Critics did not come up with this strategy on their

such metaphors is, again, that he is more interested in their preponderance as such, that is, in “metaphorical diction in general” (LFA 406, XIII:520). Another reason is that his account of metaphor as the solution to the problem of the “symbol” encourages him to emphasize the singleness of metaphorical meaning. This is not worth going into here. Roughly, Hegel thinks there are two kinds of polysemy: the failed, unintended sort characteristic of Egyptian art, the meaning of whose symbols is merely *ambiguous* (and which must therefore be “read off” by “experts”); and the bold semantic complexity (which is not precisely *ambiguity*) of the image. Hegel is trying to position metaphor as, on the one hand, an achievement with respect to the immaturity of the symbol and, on the other, a less interesting figure of speech than the image and the simile. Let’s now consider the latter.

Hegel’s discussion of the redundancy of the simile and the puzzles it creates is one of the more curious and original passages in the *Aesthetics*. A metaphor, recall, is an implicit comparison the point of which is simply to move from the expression to the referent; the meaning of a metaphor *just is* the referent; there is no *Sinn*, no connotation, to speak of. An image, by contrast, has everything to do with connotation, with the friction of meanings between the expression and the referent, and the image announces as much by giving us the referent at the outset. There is no real formula for what Hegel means by a simile, or comparison. It is simply any figure characterized by redundancy. Thus Macbeth’s great speech in Act 5, Scene 3 is a simile because it expresses the idea that life is pathetic and false in three different ways: it is a walking shadow, a poor player, and a tale told by an idiot. We would simply call this a series of related metaphors (*X is A, X is B, X is C*), but what interests Hegel here is not the content of the images but the rhetorical force of the form: its repetition and its redundancy. Even more curiously, the famous description of Achilles’ shield in Book XVIII of the *Iliad* is a simile. No comparison is ever explicitly mentioned, and no one image is ever repeated. But Hegel’s point is that once we realize that the shield is an image of the world – once we have fixed its *Bedeutung* – the comparison ought to be over. (Achilles carries the world on his arm: he is just that great. Now, back to the action.) Instead, we read for dozens and dozens of lines about the various aspects of that world which the shield represents.

own, of course; writers like Joyce and Eliot wrote literature that taught the critics how to read it, and then changed the way they read everything.

Hegel's puzzlement over the redundancy of the epic simile may itself seem puzzling at first. When Homer says in Book IV of the *Iliad* that Athena did not forget Menelaus but "repelled the deadly arrow as a mother flicks a fly away from her son when he lies in sweet slumber" (LFA 416, XIII:533), Hegel suggests that since we have already been told the arrow was flicked away, the second half of the simile is strangely "superfluous."⁹⁵ This might seem a curious thing to say on the face of it. Isn't the point of the simile to show us *how* Athena repelled the arrow – namely, dismissively, yet with a certain motherly concern? And, in general, doesn't the simile enliven the scene with concrete imagery? Hegel rejects these explanations. Similes "are neither to be employed on account of mere *Lebendigkeit*, as is commonly thought, nor for the sake of greater clarity" (LFA 411, XIII:527). Similes often risk dullness, he says, and the clarification of Athena's role could have been achieved more economically. His examples bear this out. Just after the image cited above, Hegel notes, "when the arrow did nevertheless wound Menelaus" we encounter the following simile: "As when a woman from Lydia or Caria bedecks ivory with purple to make a bridle for a horse, but it stands in her room and many riders have wished to carry it away; yet it stands as a king's prize; two things, adornment for the horse, fame for the rider: so the blood of Menelaus flowed down his thighs" (LFA 416, XIII:533–4). Hegel is right: the poet simply seems to lose track of the point he is making in a manner almost bewildering to the reader. No wonder he thinks that images fix and guide the attention while similes allow it to wander.⁹⁶ We know that the purple ivories correspond to the

95 "[D]ie Vergleichung [ist] nur eine Wiederholung ... ein vollkommen Überflüssiges" (1826a, Ms. 194; LFA 410–11, XIII:526). The simile's explicitude is naturally a matter of degree. Less explicit is Plato's epigrammatic address to Aster, a young lover: "O Aster! If only I could be a starry heaven, so as to see you with a thousand eyes" (1820, Ms. 92). The expression (starry heaven) and the reference (thousand eyes) are both stated, but there is little sense of redundancy. More explicit are the Homeric similes (LFA 416, XIII:533) or those of Shakespearean tragedy (e.g. Brutus' confession to Cassius; LFA 420, XIII:538). The Song of Solomon belongs to the class of similes because even though each line is original ("thy hair is as a flock of goats that appear from mount Gilead"), each expresses the beloved's beauty and is thus redundant (1826a, Ms. 197). "Lovers often have thousands of ideas" which are "not always immediate similes, though for the most part they are indeed images" (1820, Ms. 92).

96 "Der Gegenstand für sich kann abgetan sein, und man geht dann fort von diesem Inhalt zu anderem, das im Zusammenhange steht; tritt aber ein Bild ein, so wird die Aufmerksamkeit durch das Bild auf denselben gehoben" (1826b, Ms. 41a).

bleeding legs; but how does the reluctance of these women to share these bridles correspond in any way to the situation of poor bleeding Menelaus? And wildly, perhaps brilliantly superfluous is the pause to contemplate whether not only a woman from *Lydia* but also, in fact, one from *Caria* would so bedeck her bridles. There is something curiously modern in these passages on Homeric simile, something reminiscent of the way in which Woolf's characters or Proust's narrator will become sidetracked in the middle of an observation until the new thought that cuts across it grows, flowers into its own simile, and eventually – because it is somehow more interesting than the first point – overwhelms and obscures it.

There are interesting things to be said about “like” and “as,” and Aristotle says them.⁹⁷ But it should be clear at this point that Hegel's interest in a theory of figurative language has little to do with the traditional concerns of rhetoric or the philosophy of language. His interests are instead idiosyncratic, pragmatic, and, as always, historical. On the one hand, he wants to distinguish the immediacy, the close-endedness of metaphor from the open-endedness of the image and the simile. He is explicit on this last point: “The motive for images and similes is the lingering in the object” (1826b, Ms. 41a), a point to which we return below. On the other hand, he wants to distinguish the *guided* open-endedness of the image from the more *arbitrary* open-endedness of the simile. Finally, he wants to distinguish styles rich in figurative language from instances of those figures themselves. With these concerns before us, we can turn to his account of the uses and values of figurative language and of the talents of wit and imagination they feature and require.

The uses of figurative language

Hegel is less interested in the nuances of particular metaphors than he is in the idea of the metaphorical style as such, a style that often forces the reader to pause and seek the referent of a figure in “another field of thought [*Vorstellen*]” (1826a, Ms. 190) and is thus characterized

97 His observation in the *Rhetoric* is that the simile is a slightly diluted version of the metaphor, “differing from it only in the way it is put; and just because it is longer it is less attractive. Besides, it does not say outright that ‘this’ is ‘that,’ and therefore the hearer is less interested in the idea” (*Rhetoric*, 1410b). Hegel, who may not have been as familiar with the *Rhetoric* as with the *Poetics*, takes no account of this point.

by “interruption” and “distraction [*Zerstreuen*]” (1826a, Ms. 190; LFA 407–8, XIII:523).⁹⁸ Greek prose (Plato) and poetry (Homer) enjoyed a “purity and definiteness” because, excepting the occasional free-standing simile, they “held themselves much more to the literal expression” than did the “flowery,” metaphorical styles of Catholic Spain and Sufi Persia (1820, Ms. 89).⁹⁹ Is Hegel reviving the old philosophical prejudice against rhetoric here? Since the resurgence of an analytic tradition in the work of Hobbes and Locke, European philosophers had certainly revived their anti-figurative pique.¹⁰⁰ And yet it would be hard to name a philosopher who, for better or worse, did more to reintroduce the figurative register into philosophical discourse than Hegel himself.¹⁰¹ He has nothing to say about his own style, however, pointing instead to the “decorative and extremely rich ... diction of Herder and Schiller” (LFA 1010, XV:288).

98 If you have never heard the expression “happy as a clam” before, you are not likely to have trouble paraphrasing it when you do. Still, if the image is evocative, it is likely to claim your attention for a moment. This, I believe, is the sort of distraction Hegel has in mind.

99 Hegel thinks that some classical scholars will reject his view – those who consider the epic simile an “ornament” (1826a, Ms. 198) and the “style of the ancients ... decorated [*geschmückt*]” (1826a, Ms. 189). He is concerned enough about this to spend a moment on a rather interesting diagnosis of the hermeneutic error: we pick up metaphorical resonances much more readily in dead languages than in living ones, he observes. The reason has to do not with the languages themselves, but with our familiarity with them. “In living languages,” Hegel notes, the difference “allows itself to be felt somewhat [*läßt sich das etwas fühlen*]” (1826a, Ms. 189). In fact, the distinction applies in general to languages fluently and less-than-fluently spoken. Hegel emphasizes the living/dead distinction because he wants to resist the suggestion that Greek poetry and prose are heavily figurative.

100 Locke famously inveighs in the *Essay* against “the abuse of words” that is “figurative speech” (italics removed). Locke is speaking here of prose style (“discourses”); still, the sentiment is representative.

101 Supporters of the cause of metaphor have often sought to defend its value from Enlightenment prejudice by pointing to the profoundly metaphoric nature of language itself. I.A. Richards is a fine example: “Throughout the history of Rhetoric, metaphor has been treated as a sort of happy extra trick with words, an opportunity to exploit the accidents of their versatility, something in place occasionally but requiring unusual skill and caution. In brief, a grace or ornament or *added* power of language, not its constitutive form ... [However,] [t]hat metaphor is the omnipresent principle of language can be shown by mere observation.” I.A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965 [1936]), Lecture v, 90–2. Hegel, who sees well enough that language is a compost of dead metaphor (see his remarks on “*begreifen*” and “*fassen*,” 1826a, Ms. 189), is proof from this rebuttal, one that seems in any case to draw an aesthetic ought from a genetic is.

The important point here is the mood that is expressed in metaphor's post-Renaissance rise to prominence.¹⁰² First, its elliptical references and skittering allusions seem to involve a willful interest in complication and anti-naturalism.¹⁰³ In this regard, Hegel dryly observes, it is paradigmatically modern, appealing to the "spirit and heart which are not content with the simple, customary, and plain" (LFA 406, XIII:520). It belongs to "modern taste," to the world of reflection, to insist on complicating "that which is simple and pure" by presenting it as "something doubled" (1820, Ms. 89).¹⁰⁴ Second, the modern taste for metaphor is spurred on by our own lack of classical beauty and dignity. It is "the poverty of [modern] language which necessitates metaphors" (1820, Ms. 89).¹⁰⁵ We have heard this complaint before. It is the idea of the colonization of the natural language (poetry) by the flattened-out language of prose. So the metaphorical style of romantic writing just is the "more deliberate style" Hegel said was called for (LFA 1006, XV:282). Its function is to break up the referentiality of the text, to problematize the transparency of prose, and to renovate the possibilities of expression.¹⁰⁶ "If poetic expression is to arouse any interest it must diverge from that ordinary speech and be made something fresh, elevated, and witty" (LFA 1009, XV:286–7).

Of particular interest in Hegel's account of the use of metaphor is his resistance to the notion, traditional since Aristotle and common enough in his own day, that metaphor serves the aims of, precisely, "liveliness" (LFA 406, XIII:520).¹⁰⁷ In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle commends

102 This is emphasized more in the lectures (1820, Ms. 89–90; 1823, Ms. 135; 1826a, Ms. 189–90) than in Hotho (LFA 407–8, XIII:522–3).

103 The distractedness of metaphor is seen from another angle in drama. Shakespeare and Calderón, for instance, express spiritual agitation by having their characters speak in metaphor. This suggests "the strength of the movement of the mind," and its "restless, emotional" quality (1820, Ms. 90). More generally, metaphor makes visible the struggle toward expressive freedom and away from the "dullness of concentrated pain" (*ibid.*).

104 Likewise, as Goethe claimed, "The taste for allegory belongs to the romantic age" (1826a, Ms. 186).

105 This is not a complaint about language as such, but, as Hotho shows us, a complaint about the resources of modern languages – i.e. those that lack the "infinite clarity and suppleness" of Greek (LFA 408, XIII:523). A.W. Schlegel concurs that metaphor originates in "the poverty of description," though he applauds its "progress from needs to free play" (*Vorlesungen*, I, 280).

106 "The purely prosaic style has to abstain from metaphor above all" (1826b, Ms. 41).

107 Hegel mentions the classicist C.G. Heyne; Creuzer makes the point as well in his *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders die Griechen*, vol. I, §28, translated in C. Harrison, P.J. Wood, and J. Gaiger, eds., *Art in Theory, 1685–1815* (Oxford: Blackwell,

the power of metaphor to engage the listener, first by succinctly conveying new ideas,¹⁰⁸ and second by rendering familiar ideas vivid. “The words, too, ought to set the scene before our eyes,” Aristotle writes; “for events ought to be seen in progress rather than in prospect” (1410b). Accordingly, he praises “Homer’s common practice of giving metaphorical life to lifeless things: all such passages are distinguished by the effect of activity they convey” (1411b). Why does Hegel, for whom liveliness, as in the case of Dutch art, represents the central redeeming possibility for late romantic art deny this value to the metaphoric style? Because liveliness is not mere agitation; it is the reconciliation of dynamic opposition, not the mere fact of this opposition itself. The writer who adopts the metaphoric style, Hegel thinks, is staging a sort of protest against the monopolization of language by prose and the deadening of its imagistic powers in the false transparency, the commitment to mere “accuracy,” of journalistic style. Nor is the metaphoric style virtuosic. The question here concerns the direction of the reader’s attention. The metaphorical style is not meant to turn us toward the writer himself and the celebration of his powers – this happens in the *Bild* – but to complicate our relationship to language, to leave a sort of smudge on the clear window of prose style, to draw our attention, as in Dutch painting, to the marked surface that generates its magical depth.

Next: “the *Bild* expresses in particular the boldness [*Kühnheit*] of the poet who, concerned with one object, brings it together with something very far removed from it, whereby the subjective power of *Phantasie*, which introduces and binds together a remote content, is made visible [*vorstellig*]” (1826a, Ms. 194–5; cf. LFA 411, XIII:527). Hegel’s example, Goethe’s “Mohammed’s Song,” is not well known today but the strategy is familiar to lyric poetry from the seventeenth century (the boldness of the metaphysical conceit in, for example, Donne’s “The Flea”) to the twentieth. W.C. Williams’s “Poem,” for instance, tells of a cat who, working its way over a piece of furniture, steps, unknowingly, into a flowerpot; this is an image of what it is to write a poem: to take a small, domestic sort of risk; to feel one’s way; imagine oneself free;

2000), 1146–51. Kant is making the same point when he suggests that the poet “provides food for the understanding and gives life [*Leben*] to its concepts by means of his imagination” (CJ §51, Ak. v:321).

108 “[W]e all naturally find it agreeable to get hold of new ideas easily . . . Now strange words simply puzzle us; ordinary words convey only what we know already; it is from metaphor that we can best get hold of something fresh” (*Rhetoric*, 1410b).

and find oneself, in small ways, trapped.¹⁰⁹ What is particularly worth noting here is that images like Goethe's and Donne's interest Hegel not so much for the points of view they express, for their content, but for the formal satisfactions they offer. The formal or abstract value of art, recall, consisted in the "practical" demonstration of freedom from the constraints of externality and the "theoretical" demonstration of the mind's own participation in and production of that externality (LFA 31, XIII:51). Each of these interests is satisfied in the "boldness" of the *Bild*. On the one hand, the unexpectedness of the conceit demonstrates the poet's freedom from habit and association. On the other hand, and more significantly, Hegel observes that in poetic images we can see "the spirit, the imagination, at work [*den arbeitenden Geist, Phantasie*]" (1826b, Ms. 41a), which is to say, we can see "the subjective power of the imagination ... made *vorstellig*." This is a phrase we have encountered before: "The abstractly universal satisfaction of art is that man makes appearance as such *vorstellig*" (1828, Ms. 129a). In the last chapter, it was the Dutch genre painter's decomposition of the visual field that led Hegel to reflect on the spontaneity implicit in simple episodes of perception. We can now think of the poetic image as permitting a comparable discovery in the case of the imagination. Much as a single color impression emerges from the eye's assembly of discrete flecks of blue and white and gray, a coherent image can emerge from the poet's combination of Prophet and mountain stream or poet and circumspect cat. In its practical deployment, the boldness of the image is a case of negative virtuosity; in its theoretical deployment, the direction of our attention is turned away from the artist and toward the now *vorstellig* spontaneity of the mind.

Hegel's discussion of simile is one to which we will return in [chapter 5](#), for it lays much of the groundwork, already in 1826, for what Hegel will come to call, in 1828, objective humor. In fact, his account of the uses of simile offers one of the clearest and most decisive points of contrast, and development, between the pessimism of 1823 and the burgeoning optimism of 1826. The question to which Hegel responds in each case is also one that bears a resemblance to the question that opens the account of Dutch genre painting. In that case, we have seen, Hegel wondered how an art of such triviality could be an art at all. Here, he asks aloud about the purpose of styles, like those of Homer

109 For discussion, see Helen Vendler, *Poems, Poets, Poetry* (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 1997), 77–9.

and Shakespeare, particularly rich in digressive figures of speech. Given their often “wearisome *superfluity*”, he observes, we must wonder “what essential aim or interest there is in the use of single or multiplied similes” (LFA 411, XIII:526). We know that the answer has something to do with “lingering [*Verweilen*],” which Hegel considers the poetic motivation (*Veranlassung*) for both image and simile (1826b, Ms. 41a) and which distinguishes these from the brief interruptions of metaphor. Lingering over what, and for what reason? The account of 1823, taking Homeric and Shakespearean simile as his paradigm, offers the simile as an escape. By 1826, however, a new possibility occasioned by the poetry of Goethe and Hafiz has suggested itself. This new possibility will provide the form for post-romantic art that, I argued in [chapter 1](#), can accommodate its content (*Humanus*) and that Hegel has conceivably been looking for throughout the 1820s. The result of this lingering – a *Vertiefung*, or absorption – can then be understood as an elaboration or translation of ideas first explored in the account of Dutch genre painting.

In 1823, Hegel argues that the redundancy of the simile serves to interrupt and weaken the grip of that practical desire, the *Versenktsein in das Interesse*, that can imprison both the reader of epics and the dramatic protagonist herself. The former case is straightforward. Reading for the plot, “we are ourselves biased in the matter at hand” (1823, Ms. 136). That is, we want the good guys to win. By interrupting the progress of the plot – losing us in a comparison of Menelaus’ wounded legs with hard-to-get Lydian (Carian?) decorative bridles – the simile returns us to the “disinterested contemplative consideration . . . proper to the arts” (1823, Ms. 136).¹¹⁰ This reading of the function of epic simile in the *Iliad* is not taken very seriously by contemporary scholars, though it is certainly an interesting anticipation of modern theories of aesthetic distance.¹¹¹ The 1823 version also applies the logic of interruption to an account of simile in Shakespeare’s dramas. *Sturm und Drang* critics, Hegel notes, questioned the plausibility of long,

110 “Moral contradictions necessarily interest our heart and for that reason rob the mind of its freedom” (Schiller, “On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry,” 205). For A.W. Schlegel on Homeric similes (*Gleichnisse*), see *Vorlesungen*, I, 367.

111 James Redfield, for instance, suggests that “the rhetorical purpose of the similes” in the *Iliad* is, straightforwardly, “to make vivid the world of war.” *Nature and Culture in the Iliad* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994 [1975]), 187. In other words, simile is not different in rhetorical force from metaphor, where this is understood (in Aristotle) as an instrument of “enlivenment.”

heavily figurative speeches delivered by characters *in extremis*. (They preferred characters who say “Och” and “O.”) But such naturalism fails to unburden itself.¹¹² Moreover, it misses precisely what is great in Shakespeare: namely, that Macbeth’s string of superfluous imagery is not poetic decoration but “the heart free[ing] itself, because it is in pain, in similes” (1823, Ms. 139). Likewise, in her appeal to “gentle night” to take Romeo “when he shall die” and “cut him out in little stars” and make the sun jealous, Juliet is not merely “expressing *Sehnsucht* as such” but trying to objectify and externalize her grief. The distinction that Hegel will draw in 1826 is already implicit here, and has been since 1820, but he is not yet aware of it as such.

This is the distinction between distraction and absorption. Where it is the *reader* who is lost in passion, as in the case of our concern for Menelaus, the simile works because it has to do only tangentially with the case at hand. It is precisely its irrelevance that allows it to distract us. But where it is the *protagonist* who is lost in passion or heartache, it makes no sense to speak of distraction or interruption. Rather, we have a straightforward case of expression, and the simile works only because it is related to the passion it objectifies. In 1823, privileging the former case, Hegel had thought of simile principally as an “interruption [*Unterbrechung*].” But in 1826, he makes the distinction explicit: “When we consider the simile further, we find two more particular interests connected with it ... One is that we absorb ourselves in the object [*sich in den Gegenstand vertiefen*]; the other that we distance ourselves from it.”¹¹³ The latter, which allows us to “interrupt the seriousness” of a situation, occurs in Homer (1826b, Ms. 41a). But it is the former case that now interests Hegel the most. Why?

First, the shift is occasioned by a change in the priority of genres. Hegel had always been a subtle reader of Shakespeare and of the lyric power of his soliloquies.¹¹⁴ But in Goethe’s later poems, and in the Persian tradition that inspires them, Hegel has found a tradition equally varied and brilliant in its imagery and equally concerned with the project of articulation. (Goethe’s early verse, Hegel felt, had been

112 “[S]chreit es sich aus, ist es unmittelbar versenkt” (1823, Ms. 138).

113 The notion of *Vertiefung* was on Hegel’s mind. Humboldt used the term to translate the Hindi *yoga*, interestingly enough, and it is all over Hegel’s 1826 review of Humboldt’s essay on the *Bhagavad-Gita*.

114 “Shakespeare makes his characters as it were into artists, poets,” he observes, who can “make themselves and their situations objective, whereby he shows them as elevated above their situations” (1820, Ms. 93; cf. LFA 1228, xv:562).

more traditionally Romantic, more interested in gesturing at rather than fully expressing the burdens of feeling.) The function of the simile in epic now seems like the exception. The key to repetition or variation on a theme lies not in the poet's effort to distract himself from the matter at hand; just the opposite: he wishes to commit himself, to immerse or absorb himself, in the "object" of concern. Second, *Phantasie* is as important to the 1826 account as it was absent from the earlier one. The reason for this has again to do with the nature of lyric: the tragic agent can pursue his freedom in the world, but the poet can do so only in reflection. Third, the 1826 account invokes the two central mechanisms, the two formal strategies, of Dutch art. The first of these, "the heart's absorption," or *Sichvertiefen* (LFA 412, XIII:528), has already been mentioned. (What the poet's heart absorbs itself in is, moreover, an everyday and contingent matter: typically, love.) The second mechanism of Dutch painting is the redemption of the ordinary by way of the poet's brilliant technique.

Virtuosity had played no role in the 1823 account of simile because it plays no role in epic or drama.¹¹⁵ But we have already seen Hegel's emphasis in 1826 on the "boldness" of poetic images and the sense they give of "the spirit, the imagination, at work." But, strikingly, the poet's virtuosity plays the same role here as the painter's: "In similes the object is raised up and, so to speak, blessed [*gepriesen*]" (1826b, Ms. 41a). The superfluous labors of the simile turn out to yield a sort of creative attention to the object, a donation of significance, that lifts it into view and beguiles both poet and reader into caring about it. Hegel does not mention a connection here to his account of the intimacy, or *Innigkeit*, which the painter's illusionism allows the spectator to feel with the painted object. But the mechanism is related. We saw in [chapter 2](#) that it was the viewer's participation in the creation of the painted scene, her interpretation of the canvas's two dimensions as the image's three, that led her, at some general level, to take an emotional interest in that scene, an interest, at any rate, that was more intimate and immediate than any she had felt for the cool self-sufficiency of the marble god. The intimacy we feel with paintings in general – the fact that "everything" they represent has an implicit "relationship to the heart" (1823, Ms. 232) – is made by nature of the medium as such, and does not require virtuosic treatment. When that virtuosity does appear,

115 Homer and Shakespeare disappear into their works. The lyric poet, however, is both speaker and subject; Hamlet only *shows* brilliance, but Goethe's poems *display* it.

as in Dutch art, the analogies to the poet's use of image and simile grow even stronger. Goethe's account of his latest amours or Hafiz's of a drunken spree have little to do, on the face of it, with pictures of the hard-working Dutch, threading their needles by candlelight. What is common to each is an unexpected, almost prodigal expenditure of talent and vigor, one that forces us, even against our will, to see the finite world as one in which we are alive.

Hegel does not offer any particularly helpful examples of the virtuosic poet's creation of attachment by the simile's lingering manipulation of our attention.¹¹⁶ In chapter 5, we will have a chance to consider the ways in which Goethe, in a poem from his *West-östliche Divan*, raises up and blesses (quite literally) the ordinary experience of a lovers' reunion. But for a simpler example of the superfluities of poetic comparison, consider the sonnet. Too short to unfold a narrative, as in the ballad, the sonnet often assumes a structure of theme and variation in which a given idea (e.g. the ravages of time) is realized in a series of comparisons. In Shakespeare's Sonnet 73, for instance, the idea is the speaker's old age, which he invites the beloved to consider as the autumn of a year, then as the sunset of a day, and finally as the glowing remnants of a fire. Or in Keats's "On Looking into Chapman's Homer," we are invited to compare the experience of reading Homer not in Pope's mannered translation but in Chapman's vigorous style first to that of an astronomer discovering a new planet, probably through a telescope, and then to that of the discovery of the Pacific by the Spanish conquistadors. Of course these chains of comparison are not arranged at random – as is perhaps more the case, at least in Hegel's view, in the Persian lyric form known as the ghazal.¹¹⁷ The shrinking calendar of Shakespeare's movement from a year to a day to an evening (the lifespan of a fire) quietly intensifies the speaker's own sense of being out of time; in Keats, meanwhile, the purpose of the succession of images is to allow us to watch the poet in his work of imagination, for it will turn out that the comparison to Cortez is, for complicated reasons, much more successful than the comparison to an astronomer. But if Hegel does not enter into such detail, his general point still holds – namely, that the poet's virtuosity in drawing productive comparisons among

116 I have had trouble making sense of his comments on the "similitive [*vergleichendes*] relationship" of the rose to the nightingale in Persian lyric poetry and on the way in which Hafiz identifies with, or "absorbs himself in the soul and the spirit" of the rose (1826b, Ms. 37a).

117 See the section on "Objective humor and the *West-östliche Divan*" in chapter 5.

the most unlikely things draws us into a course of reflection upon the object that ends by making it something much more serious than it had first seemed. The mumblings of a middle-aged man worried that he is no longer attractive to his young lover are hardly the stuff of epic. And if someone were to tell Sophocles or Dante that a supremely moving poem might be written not about epic deeds themselves, nor even about the encounter with those deeds in epic verse, but rather about re-encountering those deeds, long familiar, in a new *translation* – and then, absurdly, comparing that encounter to the heroic conquest of the Americas – he would blink.

Simile thus functions oppositely in the lyric and the epic. In the latter, the subject matter at hand is so potent and interest-laden (e.g. the death of Hector) that the simile serves to pry our attention away from the poetic object; in the lyric, by contrast, the simile fastens the poet's and our attention upon the trivial subject under discussion and thereby creates an interest in it, "make[s] significant even what is in itself without significance" (LFA 596, XIV:224), in the way that we begin to take an interest in the fortunes of a country once we have visited it. But that way of putting the point is misleading. It is not that the poet simply manages, like a good advertiser, to catch our eye or interest us in some given thing. Instead, in her imaginative work, in the experimentation with chains of imagery comparing the object now to this and now to that, the poet not only displays but recreates the object in question. In Goethe and Hafiz, Hegel says in a crucial passage, the poetic object is here idealized, "made into a thing of the imagination." In this way, the mere objectivity of scenes of love and work is shot through with spirit and feeling; the plainness, triviality, and indifference of the prose of life is, for a moment, overcome. And this overcoming, this imaginative refashioning of the object, is in turn "the joy," Hegel continues, "the absorption in the subjective object preeminent in the poets of the East" (1826b, Ms. 42).

We have distinguished in this chapter several different values of virtuosity. Negative virtuosity, or what Hegel calls the "practical"¹¹⁸ aspect of the "abstract" value of art, involved the poet's displays of boldness and the oppositional attitude of the metaphorical style to

118 The "contemplative" or "theoretical" aspect of this abstract need, recall, was that in which the spontaneity of the mind is made visible, or *vorstellig*, in the Dutch painter's decomposition of perceptual givens (the reflection on a jug) into a medley of blues, whites, and grays.

the dominance of prose. Despite its negativity, of course, this was an opposition undertaken in a spirit not of hostility but of hospitality, an effort to make a place for poetry alongside but independent from that of prose. A second variety, positive virtuosity, emerged from a pair of marginal observations on skill in freehand drawing and musical performance and took the form of being-at-home in a medium. (As a purely formal achievement, however – one can play a “tasteless” composition virtuosically – this form of virtuosity remains the least important to the overall theory of value in art.) A third and fully artistic form of virtuosity is the most important in the lectures. This is the display of skill that, although it must be grasped as skill and thus as originating in the artist, is nonetheless able to travel, as it were, from the artist to the object, and thereby to animate or enliven the materials of the everyday with the subjective *Lebendigkeit* of the painter’s use of color and brushwork or the poet’s imagistic play. Before looking into Keats, say, it had never occurred to us that the private act of reading could be imagined in such epic terms. Before seeing Rembrandt’s *Night Watch*, the local militia had struck us as a group of drunks and braggarts; but now we recognize them, one by one, in their commitments to our way of life.

THE LYRIC

It is in literature that Hegel finds the most promise for the post-romantic arts, and it is in Germany in particular that the “practical rules” and neo-classical strictures of eighteenth-century aesthetic theory have been “violently cast aside ... owing to the appearance of genuinely living [*lebendige*] poetry” (LFA 20, XIII:37). Nor is the choice parochial: if it comes to naming the minor golden ages of modernity, surely the German literature of the age of Goethe stands with the American Renaissance of the 1830s–60s, the Russian literature of the 1830s–90s, and the transatlantic modernism of the 1890s–1940s. The short story was essentially invented by Tieck, Kleist, and Hoffmann. Drama saw the arrival of *Faust* and Schiller’s tragedies. Meanwhile, leaving *The Sorrows of Young Werther* aside, a new tradition in the novel is founded in *Wilhelm Meister*.¹ Strikingly, none of these works seems to Hegel to point a way forward; it is the lyric, instead, that draws his attention. Even here his choices appear eccentric, however. The most influential tradition is that of the Romantic lyric that Goethe essentially invents in early poems like “Maifest,” “Es schlug mir das Herz,” and the second “Wandrer’s Nachtlid”;² also important is the output of Schiller’s and Goethe’s *Balladenjahr* of 1797–8, contemporaneous with Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s. While Hegel admires these works, as he does *Robbers* and *Faust*, he tends to view them as one-off projects

1 Other works that Hegel admires include Goethe’s *Hermann und Dorothea*, an “idyll” in verse (LFA 1110, XV:414), and *Iphigenie auf Tauris*, a “drama” rather than a “tragedy” (LFA 1204, XV:533). On the latter, see S. Houlgate, “Hegel’s Theory of Tragedy” in Houlgate, ed., *Hegel and the Arts* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 164–6.

2 In the view of David Wellbery among others; see *The Specular Moment* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).

limited by the poets' temperaments – here, Goethe's inwardness and Schiller's intellectualism. Remarkably, for instance, he does not mention a single time in the course of a decade of lectures on art the poem that perhaps meant the most to him, Schiller's "Die Freundschaft."³ Instead, *Östliche Rosen* (1828, Ms. 102a), a collection of Persian-inspired lyrics by Friedrich Rückert, professor of oriental languages and translator of Rumi, is closer to the heart of the modern literary project than are Kleist's *Erzählungen*, the poetry of Hölderlin and Novalis, or Goethe's *Faust* and *Meister*.

An account of Hegel's view of modern art must take these choices seriously, must seek to explain preferences that seem not only eccentric, but, given Hegel's concern for a living art, so oddly *dead*. Commentators have responded in various ways – exonerating Hegel, indicting him, or simply shaking their heads – but they have tended to agree with Henrich that the account of what I have called the poetry of reconciliation, or objective humor, amounts to "a striking departure from Hegel's usual methods."⁴ Beginning in the account of literary virtuosity in the previous chapter – the "negative" energies of metaphor and image that challenge the language of prose – we have already seen some evidence that the project of Goethe's *Divan* (1815–19) is not quite as frivolous as it first seems. In the remaining two chapters, we can further develop the seriousness of this project, first by considering the nature of lyric as such, and second by contrasting the lyric works Hegel admires with the prose epics – *Meister* – he largely ignores. Hegel's theory of tragedy has been exhaustively studied, but his theory of the lyric has received little attention.⁵ First, a discussion of Hegel's system of the arts, "The lyric in the system of the arts," helps us to locate literature as the preeminent modern art and lyric as the preeminent modern voice or mode. Next, the formal elements of the lyric suit it to introspection and to the emerging importance of the poetic persona ("Lyric form"). There are essentially two ways in which the lyric makes

3 Apart from its famous place in the concluding lines of the *Phenomenology*, the poem continued to appear in Hegel's lectures on history (1817) and religion (throughout the 1820s).

4 Henrich, "Kunst und Kunst Philosophie der Gegenwart" in H.R. Jauss, ed., *Poetik und Hermeneutik 1* (Munich: Eidos Verlag, 1964), 16; translated as "Art and Philosophy of Art Today: Reflections with Reference to Hegel" in Richard E. Amacher and Victor Lange, eds., *New Perspectives in German Literary Criticism: A Collection of Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

5 For the former, see M.W. Roche, *Tragedy and Comedy: A Systematic Study and a Critique of Hegel* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998).

visible an achievement of reconciliation: first, in love poetry, as the negotiation of sexual desire and reflective freedom (“Love poetry”); second, in “occasional” verse, as the encounter with the trivial and the contingent (“Occasional verse”). A concluding discussion of the *Lied* as a particularly national art prepares us to understand the significance of medieval Persia for modern Germany (“Song and nation”).

The lyric in the system of the arts

En route to the claim that lyric poetry is foremost among the post-romantic arts, let’s begin with an excursus into the problems Hegel confronts and solves in elaborating a system of the arts as such. Outside of Lessing’s *Laokoon*, the first such effort with which Hegel was familiar would likely have been Schelling’s of 1803. Hegel’s appraisals of the individual arts often track those of his younger colleague, but the principles of organization at work offer an informative contrast.

At the center of Schelling’s system is a distinction between the “verbal” and the “formative” arts, or, literature and everything else. The idea of literature’s distinctiveness and supremacy is common to both Kant and A.W. Schlegel; what is new in Schelling is an effort to systematize this distinction by way of a parallel with the “real and ideal series of philosophy,” or the philosophy of nature and the philosophy of mind.⁶ Literature, the “ideal” art, brings the absolute before the mind; sculpture, painting, and music, the “real” arts, bring it before the senses. The distinction has evaluative consequences. Since the aim of the formative arts is to present the absolute in object form, sculpture is first among the non-literary arts, the objectless art of music is third, and painting is second. This hierarchy reappears in Hegel in the account of *beautiful art*, and for related reasons. (Beauty requires immediacy and completeness of apprehension, which is most possible in the simplicity of the sculptural form.) But Hegel declines Schelling’s sharp distinction between literature and the formative arts, perhaps because such an opposition leaves the speculative philosopher waiting for a third term, a point of reconciliation (or “indifference”) between words and things. Instead, as we have seen, Hegel exchanges Schelling’s opposition of real and ideal for a relationship of essence and appearance: “literature is the universal art,” the “essence” of its various forms

6 F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophy of Art*, trans. D.W. Stott (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 18.

(LFA 89, XIII:123; cf. LFA 796, XV:16), which is the purely creative or poietic moment of imagination from which the elements of externality – three spatial dimensions, two spatial dimensions, one temporal dimension – have been steadily pared away.⁷

More significant is the contrast between Hegel's and Schelling's efforts to realize or secure objectivity for their as yet purely conceptually organized systems. Kant, who had seen the difficulty of establishing necessity for a system of the arts, offers his own proposal rather humbly.⁸ Schelling, as is his wont, seeks traction for his account in the philosophy of nature. By applying the logical schema of reality, ideality, and their resolution in "indifference" to the realm of objects, he generates the progression from sound (pure form) to light (pure essence) to organic life (formed essence),⁹ which in turn suggests the series of the formative arts: as nature develops from abstraction to concreteness, so the arts develop from music (sound) to painting (light) to sculpture (life). There is no common-sense reason to anticipate a connection between the organization of the natural universe and that of the arts, of course; what Schelling's approach offers is not a claim to proper objectivity, to a productive friction with the real world, but an ever more carefully patterned system of thought. Hegel does not find this sort of patterning unhelpful, but he is noticeably more interested when the patterns operate internally to the arts rather than relating the arts, externally, to nature. Thus, for instance, he follows Schelling in suggesting that literature can be seen to recapitulate, at a higher order, the progress of the other arts. (Lyric reprises music, epic painting, and drama sculpture.¹⁰) Nonetheless, he exercises some discretion: the plastic arts comprise, for Schelling, architecture,

7 This account of the progression of sculpture to painting to music (three to two to one dimension) is borrowed from Schelling as well.

8 His own is based on a rather curious analogy, and he offers it hesitantly, calling for more work on the subject. Kant models his schema (literature, visual art, music) on the triad "word, gesture, and tone" – that is, the three basic registers of communication. In a footnote, he cautions that this is "only one of a variety of attempts [to construct a division of the fine arts] that can and should still be made" (CJ §51, Ak. V:320n).

9 Sound is "pure form, the accidental element of things" (Schelling, *Philosophy of Art*, 161); light is the "essence ... the purely ideal element of the object" (161); life is the "organic" interaction of the two (182).

10 Schelling: "Poesy is the higher potency [*Potenz*] of formative art" (ibid., 202). For the distinction between verbal and formative art, see pp. 99–102 (§§73–4) and 200–3. Hegel: literature "repeats in its own field the modes of presentation characteristic of the other arts" (LFA 627, XIV:262; see 668, XV:234).

bas-relief, and sculpture, which in turn echo music, painting, and their indifference.¹¹ Hegel ignores this.

In fact, he ignores Schelling altogether. Perhaps because it was never published, perhaps because he draws upon it so frequently, or perhaps out of a sense of Schelling's growing irrelevance, Hegel makes no mention of the series of lectures his colleague delivered in 1803 and with which Hegel must have been intimately familiar. Still, it is reasonable, at least heuristically, to construe his own effort as a sort of reply. Commentators on Hegel's system of the arts have not always been generous: a contemporary reviewer considered it "an embarrassment" on Hegelian terms; Bungay, who reports this opinion, finds it "hard to disagree."¹² But while there are certainly obscurities that call for explanation, particularly when the conceptual picture is mapped onto the historical frame, it is this very effort to seek objectivity for the system in history that distinguishes Hegel and provides the sort of friction with reality that Schelling's inventive analogies lack. In the end, Hegel's proposal takes the form of a simple, elegant, testable hypothesis: over the course of their history, the arts grow increasingly ideal.

Hegel's first step is to reconstruct, on conceptual grounds, the series of the arts with respect to the relative ideality of their contents and forms, where ideality refers to the degree of mind-dependence (and thus, so far as content is concerned, inwardness) as against mind-independence (physicality, sensuousness, and so forth).¹³ We can see how painting supersedes sculpture, idealizing its depth, music supersedes painting by idealizing its spaces, and literature supersedes music by idealizing temporal progression itself, where idealizing

11 Schelling's translator makes this point at *Philosophy of Art*, xlvii. Painting, meanwhile, comprises drawing (real), modeling (ideal), and coloring (indifference).

12 The contemporary reviewer is Weisse (Bungay, *Beauty and Truth: A Study of Hegel's Aesthetics* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984], 89). Bungay's objections are often captious, however. Hegel does not attempt to "deduc[e]" the individual arts from the historical series of symbolic, classical, and romantic art (ibid.). He simply tries to explain why a given art (e.g. music) should thrive in a given period (e.g. the late romantic era).

13 Bungay objects that the attempt to view the arts as a "progression from externality to internality" has already been made (in Franz Dietrich Wagner's *Hegels Theorie der Dichtung*) and failed (*Beauty and Truth*, 90). But this is because Wagner had tried to argue that the arts also grow more concrete as they grow more ideal, an idea which works well enough for the progression from architecture to sculpture to painting to literature, but which stumbles on music.

means recasting a property of an object as a feature of an experience. (Sculpture idealizes not so much the form of architecture as its content.) Thus paintings generate an experience of depth which they do not themselves possess; music generates an experience of spatiality, a “soaring” melody, for instance; and literature generates an experience of time, for while musical notes rise and fall, printed words exist simultaneously before the eye; the temporal successions they express exist only in the mind. Notice that Hegel has reversed Schelling’s (and Kant’s) series: music is no longer the first and least stage of formative art but the final one, the prelude to literature. This is because Schelling’s system is organized on essentially evaluative lines, according to which the best (most beautiful) art must come last. We’ll see in a moment the advantages Hegel’s own version offers. For the moment, it is worth noting that though Hegel disclaims musical connoisseurship and may not have understood Beethoven as well as we would like, his appreciation of the power of music’s ideality,¹⁴ its incipient abstractness, anticipates to a significant degree the elevation of music as an art in the philosophical and critical traditions of the later nineteenth century, from Schopenhauer to Nietzsche and from Pater to Proust.

Corresponding to the increasing formal ideality of the mediums is an expansion of the artwork’s content in both its depth and breadth. While the beauty achieved in sculpture becomes progressively more difficult to reprise, the increasing ideality of the particular arts yields a corresponding expansion of emotional and psychological depth. Recall that it was the cancellation of the third dimension that brought the viewer into a relationship of intimacy (*Innigkeit*) with the half-imagined scene. In music, as noted, the work itself comes to exist only in reproductive imagination. To hear a motif *as* a motif, in other words, we must remember its having appeared before, and this *Erinnerung* in turn intensifies the auditor’s relationship to her own interior (*Innere*).¹⁵ Music thus expresses “the purest abstract inwardness as such” (1826b, Ms. 77a), and it is this depth that yields what Hegel refers to as the

¹⁴ Schelling notes this point but makes little of it (*Philosophy of Art*, 118).

¹⁵ Hegel puts this point in terms of the composer: “Recollection [*Erinnerung*] of the theme adopted is at the same time the artist’s inner collection [*Er-innerung*] of himself, i.e. an inner conviction that *he* is the artist and can expatiate in the theme at will and move hither and thither in it” (LFA 897). “Die Erinnerung an das angenommene Thema ist gleichsam eine Erinnerung des Künstlers, d. h. ein Innwerden, daß er

“curious power” of music, one in which the movements of the harmony come to resemble the movements of the soul.¹⁶ A second expansion of the artwork’s content takes place in painting, which, as we have seen, stuffs the corners of its canvas with everyday particulars. Literature consummates this twofold expansion of content by marrying the psychic depth of musical feeling to the mimetic breadth of painting’s range, a range that it in turn greatly expands.¹⁷ Freed from medium-based constraints on expressive possibilities, the poet’s “material is thus infinitely richer than in any other art” (1820, Ms. 232; LFA 967, xv:233). This in turn allows us to see why literature is an art that flourishes in every age and yet is particularly suited to the post-romantic situation. Because it can express anything, it is at home in any era.¹⁸ But because it is at home in any era, it is precisely suited to an art of *Humanus*, of “everything in which man as such is capable of being at home” (LFA 607, xiv:238).¹⁹

The logic of idealization is then tested by, or realized in, the historical ascendancies and declensions of the particular arts: architecture is the preeminent symbolic art (though architecture itself peaks in Greece); sculpture and tragedy are the classical arts; and so on. Assessing such an ambitious structure of explanation is not possible here.²⁰ It is simply worth noting that we do make arguments of this sort – for example,

der Künstler ist und sich willkürlich zu ergehen und hin- und herzutreiben vermag” (xv:143).

16 “[Ü]bt die Musik eine eigentümliche Macht auf das Subjekt aus” (1826b, Ms. 77a; cf. LFA 906, xv:155).

17 “For with the increasing ideality ... of the external material, the variety of the subject matter and the forms it assumes is increased” (LFA 966, xv:232).

18 In fact, lyric is the truly “universal literature”; epic appears widely, drama less so; but “every people has songs” (1828, Ms. 149).

19 The defining character of post-romantic art is found in its “making itself independent of the mode of representation peculiar to *one* of the artforms and in its standing above the whole of these particular forms.” “The possibility of such a development in every direction,” Hegel continues, “lies from the very beginning, amongst the specific arts, in the essence of poetry alone, and it is therefore actualized ... through liberation from imprisonment in any exclusive type” (LFA 967, xv:233).

20 Hegel’s account goes something like this: architecture belonged to a world which sought to express its faith in gestures of grandeur and sublimity, an attitude unsuited to post-Reformation Europe. Without temples and churches to adorn, figurative sculpture had likewise ceased to be a significant medium. Painting, which began a striking course of development in the late thirteenth century, seemed to Hegel and many of his peers to have worn itself out by the end of the seventeenth century. Roughly contemporary with painting’s stagnation, music had begun, in the Baroque era, its own striking course of development and seemed to Hegel to possess, along with literature, an ongoing vitality. There are plenty of things to take issue with here: painting

Bakhtin's influential argument from the 1930s that the novel had eclipsed the expressive power of the drama in virtue of its formal versatility – and expect them to be taken seriously, and thus that Hegel's approach, unlike Schelling's, has nothing hoary or metaphysical about it. While his reconstruction is certainly indebted to Schelling's, Hegel simplifies and "realizes" the series of the arts: first, by reconfiguring the sharp distinction between literary and non-literary arts as the essence/appearance relationship of creativity, or *poiesis*, and thus permitting himself a unitary system of the arts organized by the progressive idealization of the medium; second, by establishing the legitimacy of that system within his philosophy of history rather than his philosophy of nature.²¹ The great advantage of this approach is that by uncoupling his system from the evaluative norm of beauty, Hegel allows the progression from sculpture to painting to music to poetry to tell a story not only about the history of the arts – a history that, given the evident "ideality" of photography, film, video art, computer art, conceptual art, sampling, and so on, has at least a fighting chance – but about the shifting tectonics of value within that history. Artistic value for Hegel is an amalgam of beauty and truth (and, at points, virtuosity). And as world history grows more intellectual, more reflective, more "ideal," we can see how the arts are both advancing (gaining depth, requisite for truth) and declining (losing both the sensuousness and the inherent dignity of the content that are each requisite for beautiful art).²² The principle of ideality offers a remarkably simple, almost visual expression of the predicament and promise of the modern arts.

We can now turn to poetry. If literature's ideality suits it to the post-romantic condition, that condition in turn favors lyric. The scheme of

flourished in the nineteenth century; in the twentieth, sculpture returned to form. The point, however, is that they did so largely by abandoning their traditional brief, figurative representation, and adopting the project of abstraction. Hegel may have been wrong to identify the visual arts with the figurative arts, but he was not so clearly wrong that the figurative arts had seen their day.

21 Writing in the wake of Schiller's fundamental historicization of the arts in "Naïve and Sentimental Poetry," Schelling acknowledges that a theory of art must take account of its history. But this history remains Schiller's: the "formal antithesis" of the ancient and the modern, which are in turn simply "two different faces" of a single unity (*Philosophy of Art*, 19).

22 On a related note, we might wonder why music is inferior to painting from the standpoint of art if it comes after it in a logical reconstruction. The answer is that music is superior to painting, but from the standpoint of philosophy, rather than art. By idealizing space and deepening the sense of subjectivity, in other words, it prepares the way for literature and then philosophy.

epic, lyric, and dramatic verse was familiar to Hegel from Schlegel and Schelling among many others.²³ It is a curious fact, however, that the genre had been accepted as a form of literature distinct from rhetoric only since the turn of the seventeenth century, centuries after Petrarch and several years after the sonnet had become, in Shakespeare's hands, not only a brilliantly successful but also a self-conscious and even self-parodying form.²⁴ Remarkably, Plato and Aristotle have nothing to say about the lyric and do not recognize it as distinct from epic or drama. From the Greek standpoint, from a world in which the state itself is a work of art, lyric is certainly the least of the three forms. The epic gives the culture its gods; drama gives it its polity; lyric gives it its winners in the hundred-yard dash.

In one sense, the rise of the lyric in the Christian era is simply the falling off of these older, grander forms: an established world has no need for the foundationalism of the epic; one whose norms are logged in codices has a less pressing need for drama. But in another sense, lyric is precisely what romantic art requires. The picture is familiar:

Out of the objectivity of the subject-matter [of epic] the spirit descends into itself, looks into its own consciousness, and satisfies the need to display, not the external reality of the matter, but its presence and actuality in the spirit's own *subjective* disposition [*Gemüt*], in the experience of the heart [*Herz*] and the reflections of imagination, and at the same time to display the contents and activity of the inner life itself ... becom[ing] the language of the *poetic* inner life [*Innere*]. (LFA 1111, xv:416)

Hegel uses these terms – *Gemüt*, *Herz*, *Innere* – more or less interchangeably to identify the feelings and attitudes that constitute the

23 A.W. Schlegel traces the distinction itself to Plato, though others point to Renaissance commentaries on the *Poetics*. What is new in the Romantic account of the poetic voices, J-M. Schaeffer observes, is “the project of reducing these three supposedly basic forms to a systematic unity that can ground their claim to describe the field of all possible poetry” (*Art of the Modern Age* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000], 131). The systematic tendency is evident in Schlegel's lectures: “Epic, lyric, dramatic; thesis, antithesis, synthesis. Effortless plenty, energetic particularity, harmonious integrity and wholeness” (*Vorlesungen*, I, 357). Schiller, whose poetic typology is based not upon the “form of presentation” (genre), but “the manner of feeling” (mode), stands apart from this tradition (*Essays*, ed. W. Hinderer and D.O. Dahlstrom [New York: Continuum, 1993], 212n, 226n.).

24 In, e.g., Sonnet 130. For the claim that lyric is distinguished only around 1600, see Glyn P. Norton, ed., *Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol. III, *The Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 217.

first-person point of view upon the world.²⁵ And it is in virtue of this first-personal address, its treatment not of the basic features of the world but of what it feels like to inhabit it, that “lyric poetry is of such overwhelming importance” in the Christian era (LFA 1152, xv:469). This importance is overwhelming, in particular, because lyric itself not only becomes culturally significant but because epic and drama are recast in the lyrical voice as well.²⁶ The point is not simply that the heart becomes an object of interest once more fundamental problems have been solved, but that the achievement, in politics and philosophy, of those very solutions has made it *more* difficult to enjoy and appreciate them with the resources of feeling. This was the force of those passages cited in [chapter 1](#), according to which poetry can free the senses and the imagination from their “servitude” to reason (LFA 1006, xv:282) and thereby allow for “a total expression of man’s whole inner life [*des ganzen Inneren*]” (LFA 1128, xv:437). The demands of interiority, or “the heart,” have nothing to do here with sentimentality or with indulgence in “feeling” for its own sake. The project, as ever, is reconciliation, an immediately felt sense of investment in one’s world, and thus the “heart’s deeper immersion in the object,” an “intensif[ication]” of satisfaction that proceeds “according to the principle of romantic art” (LFA 609, xiv:240).

Lyric form

What makes a piece of verse a lyric poem? The editors of the *New Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms* offer a sampling of traditional views, one of which belongs, notably, to Hegel.

Among the best known and most often cited proscriptions regarding the lyric are that it must (1) be brief (Poe); (2) “be one, the parts of which mutually support and explain each other, all in their proportion harmonizing with ... metrical arrangement” (Coleridge); (3) be “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (Wordsworth); (4) be an intensely subjective and personal expression (Hegel); (5) be an

25 Hegel speaks of “die Empfindung überhaupt und der Komplex derselben, das *Herz*” (PM §400A [*Anmerkung*], x:98). For a more particular account of *Gemüt* as the principle of the German temperament, see the end of this chapter.

26 See LFA 1152–3, xv:469. Not only this, but “the elementary fundamental characteristic” of lyric touches not only epic and drama but “wafts even around works of visual art” (LFA 528, xiv:141). Whatever vitality drama retains is due to its accommodation of the lyrical “principle of subjectivity” (LFA 1223, xv:555).

“inverted action of mind upon will” (Schopenhauer); or (6) be “the utterance that is overheard” (Mill).²⁷

This gloss of Hegel’s position is traditional and perfectly accurate.²⁸ Indeed, in the wake of the confessional schools of postwar British and American poetry, one might even venture to say that of the six views on offer Hegel’s strikes nearest to the essence of what, today, we imagine poetry to be. Still, the handbook’s editors find all the mentioned views insufficient; in their view, the “categorical principle of poetic lyricism” must be the “structural or substantive evidence of its melodic origins.”²⁹ Hegel is not unsympathetic to this view, or to those of the other mentioned theorists of the lyric: brevity, meter, even Wordsworth’s “overflow” are all given their due.³⁰ The handbook’s editors are approaching the lyric descriptively, however, and are thus posing a different question from Hegel’s.³¹ A theory of lyric must, on his view, account for its greatest instances, and their principle remains that of intensely personal utterance: “The heart in general [*das Gemüt überhaupt*] wants to express itself” (1823, Ms. 275).

Like all intensely personal activities, poetic expression can prove resistant to analysis. “The lyric, tendentiously stated, is the genre of contingency,” David Wellbery offers, “and of contingency, as Aristotle noted, there can be no science.”³² Hegel appears to agree: “little or nothing of a general nature can be said” on the subject (1826a, Ms. 424), he warns, and the chapters devoted to the lyric are among the briefest in the lecture transcripts.³³ Still, Hegel does offer a formal-historical

27 *New Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms*, ed. T.V.F. Brogan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 173.

28 The only difficulty is that the view does not really originate with Hegel. Schelling argues in his unpublished lectures that “more directly than any other poetic genre [lyric] takes the subject and, accordingly, particularity as its point of departure, be it that it expresses the condition of a subject, for example, the poet, or takes the occasion of an objective portrayal from an element of subjectivity” (*Philosophy of Art*, 208).

29 *New Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms*, 173.

30 The lyric is the result of an “ardor that pours itself out [*Begeisterung, die sich ergießt*]” (1828, Ms. 150).

31 “[W]e have not reached the general conception of literature by deriving it from single examples; on the contrary, we have endeavoured to develop the real exemplifications of this conception from the conception itself and consequently we cannot be required ... to subsume under this conception whatever is commonly called a poem” (LFA 971, xv:238).

32 *The Specular Moment*, 27.

33 A.W. Schlegel: “In lyric poetry there are only intervals and gradations between the song, the ode, and the elegy, but no proper contrast” (*Lectures on Dramatic Art and*

typology of lyric forms – from hymn to ode to song – and beginning with this will afford us a sense of the central dynamic in the lyric's development: the growing prominence of the poet's persona. The first of these forms, the hymn or dithyramb, is a loosely structured poem of religious praise and celebration. As in the Hebrew psalms, paradigmatic of the genre, the content remains indeterminate and issues in "a series of merely exultant outbursts" (1820, Ms. 255) which "intensifies ... into a purely vague enthusiasm" (LFA 1140, xv:453). The praise is heartfelt, but we have little feeling for the heart in question. The "particular and private character of [the poet's] ideas and feelings" is left behind (LFA 1139, xv:451), Hegel observes; the psalmists remain anonymous.

The ode is a praise-poem as well, though it takes for its object not the godhead but persons and events central to civic life.³⁴ In abandoning the divinity of the absent god for the divinity of the present community, the ode brings the symbolic vagueness of the hymn into the concreteness of the classical world. It flourishes in Greece, accordingly, whose "finest lyrical poet," Pindar, is no longer anonymous.³⁵ Pindar's odes to victorious athletes are "occasional" pieces dependent upon the contingencies of sport, and though the Olympic games are culturally central, even "important" events (1828, Ms. 150), the subject of the Greek ode "is not of the self-sufficiency, content, [and] inner objectivity that we find in the epic" (1826a, Ms. 424). If the ode is to outlast its object, as Pindar's have, it must therefore generate its own standard, "a unity of a totally different kind from epic" (LFA 1115, xv:421). As in genre painting, this unity is granted the poem by the artist's own powerfully coherent subjectivity.³⁶ Nonetheless, the ode amounts to a transitional phase in the history of lyric, a "struggle" between the prerogatives of inner authenticity and the public truth of

Literature, trans. John Black [London: George Bell, 1904], Lecture III, 39; henceforth, *Lectures*).

34 Pindar's odes are the "model [*Typus*]" for all others (1828, Ms. 150).

35 PM §394 Z [*Zusatz*].

36 Thus: "The Pindaric odes are the worst, since they have determinate occasions, but also the most beautiful, in that the givenness is left behind and the poet freely moves himself" (1826a, Ms. 378). "Here, in contrast to the [hymn]," we read in Hotho, "it is at once the independently emphasized subjective personality of the poet which is the most important thing of all" (LFA 1141, xv:454). Pindar "speaks frequently of himself" and propounds "aphorisms of wisdom" (1826a, Ms. 421). "[T]he subjectivity of the singer enters in; he even foregrounds *himself*, his feelings, his intuitions, his relations to the material" (1820, Ms. 245).

epic, “the poet’s own subjective freedom” and “the captivating might of [his] topic” (LFA 1141–2, xv:455). Hegel admires Pindar’s boldness, but the Greeks are simply not interested in boldness as such, and the fact that Pindar is largely overlooked by Plato and Aristotle suggests that the lyric plays only a marginal role in the story of Greek art, despite Klopstock’s efforts (Hegel was not aware of Keats’s), it remains “more or less foreign form to us” as well (1826b, Ms. 88).

“The proper determination of the lyric for us” (1826b, Ms. 88), Hegel says, and for the romantic era in general, is also the least structured and the most universal: “every people has songs” (1828, Ms. 149).³⁷ The progression of the lyric from the religious hymn to the civic song to the everyday love song thus tracks that of art’s own history, in which the content moves from symbolic indeterminacy and sublimity to classical concreteness and dignity to romantic particularity and triviality.³⁸ In the *Lied*, restrictions on content are removed altogether and it comes to be defined by the “infinite variety” of its subjects (1826b, Ms. 88). As in the rise of genre painting in the seventeenth century and untexted music in the eighteenth, the dispersal of the object draws attention back to the artist, whose efforts now threaten to lapse into the familiar idiosyncrasy of modern projects. As Nietzsche puts it, “our aesthetics must first solve the problem of how the ‘lyric poet’ can possibly be an artist at all, since he is someone who, so the experience of the ages tells us, always says ‘I,’ and who stands before us singing the entire chromatic scale of his passions and desires.”³⁹ Hegel’s answer is of course that “however intimately the insights and feelings which the

37 René Wellek agrees: “Slowly the purely didactic and mimetic conception of poetry receded: the ancient view – ... which recognized only drama and epic and ignored or slighted the lyric – yielded to a new conception in which the lyric or the song assumed the center of poetry. The shift is accomplished in different countries with diverse authors: with J. G. von Herder in Germany” (*Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, vol. III [New York: Scribner, 1974], 85). Emil Staiger, whose theory of the lyric departs from Hegel (arriving somewhere in the vicinity of Heidegger) considers the *Lied* “the purest type of lyric” (*Basic Concepts of Poetics* [State College: Penn State University Press, 1991]), 91.

38 The song’s “content must be light, and not significant” (1828, Ms. 150a) – the “roses, lovely girls and youths” of Anacreon (LFA 1120–1, xv:428) or the “wine, the taproom, maiden, sultan, enemies, monks” of Hafiz (1826a, Ms. 421).

39 *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. R. Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 29. Nietzsche’s solution to this problem is, not surprisingly, the opposite of Hegel’s. Nietzsche places even greater emphasis than Hegel on lyric’s origins in the irrational, Dionysiac art of music. (The first lyric poet is accordingly the brawling soldier-bard Archilochus, whom Hegel ignores.) Nietzsche’s central claim is that the subject of the lyric is not an individual, but the voice of the primal unity itself: “the ‘I’ of the lyric

poet describes as his own belong to him as a single individual, they must nevertheless possess a universal validity" (LFA 1111, xv:416). The question is how this universality is to be secured. Below, I will distinguish two strategies: the reflective purification of desire (which is contingent) from love (which is substantial), and the integration of the lyric voice in a distinctive poetic persona that is at the same time a reflection of a national temperament. For the moment, let's consider the checks against idiosyncrasy provided by the genre itself. These are few, for "the form and content of lyrical poetry is essentially of an unlimited diversity" (1826a, Ms. 424).⁴⁰ Nonetheless, its loosely musical structure offers the poet the freedoms of constraint: as Marcel puts it in *Swann's Way*, "the tyranny of rhyme forces [great poets] into the discovery of their finest lines" (cf. LFA 1013, xv:291).

Coleridge traces the origin of metered verse to the mind's desire to constrain what would otherwise amount to a raw burst of emotion; the result is "an interpenetration of passion and of will, of spontaneous impulse and voluntary purpose."⁴¹ Hegel pursues a similar line of thought (1820, Ms. 239), though he does not follow Schelling and Goethe in framing the point in Kantian terms of self-legislation. Goethe had reflected on the value of constraint in a pair of sonnets written in the first decade of the century in response to an invitation from A.W. Schlegel to revive that form, and thereby the authority of constraint itself.⁴² In the first of these, titled simply "Das Sonnet," Goethe alludes to the Coleridgean view that "eben die Beschränkung lässt sich lieben / Wenn sich die Geister gar gewaltig regen," but says he finds the form uncomfortable. The second sonnet, "Natur und Kunst," is a palinode: "Wer Grosses will, muss sich zusammenraffen; / In der Beschränkung zeigt sich erst der Meister, / Und das Gesetz nur kann uns Freiheit geben."⁴³

The limitations of meter alone are sufficient for epic, which is coherently organized by its own subject matter. Moreover, the audience of

poet sounds out from the deepest abyss of being; his 'subjectivity,' as this concept is used by modern aestheticians" – Hegel, in particular – "is imaginary" (30).

40 Hegel is aware that philosophical reflections, or "pure generalities," may also furnish material for poets (LFA 1129, xv:439).

41 Cited in Dewey, *Art As Experience* (New York: Perigree, 1980), 156.

42 See Boyle, *Goethe: The Poet and the Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1, 653, 678.

43 From "Das Sonnett": "[I]t is precisely such limitation that becomes attractive when the vital spirits are mightily astir." From "Natur und Kunst": "He who wills great things must gird up his loins; only in limitation is mastery revealed, and law alone can give us freedom" (*Goethe: Selected Verse*, trans. David Luke [New York: Penguin, 1964], 198, 197). For Schelling's version of the latter idea, see *Philosophy of Art*, 206.

the epic takes no interest in the tone of the singer's voice, his particular style, which is why the "mechanical" sound (LFA 1038, xv:322) of the hexameter line, which sounds "like a melody that drones out, so to speak, from a hand organ" (1820, Ms. 244), is not a problem. The lyric, by contrast, "demands in its presentation a more enlivened exterior ... more formation, body, support," and "the measure of the syllables [*Silbenmaße*]" in particular "must be livelier, more stirring, more diverse" (1826a, Ms. 244). The reason here is that the moods and feelings lyric seeks to express are much less determinate than the actions of the epic hero, and any expression "rooted solely in the poet himself ... necessitates an external support" if it is to move the audience, Hegel thinks; "this sensuous stimulation of our hearts can be produced by music alone" (LFA 1137, xv:449–50). (In other words, the role of music in lyric is like the original *melos* of melodrama.) In its most primitive form, the song strives for "simplicity of ... movement, meter, language" (LFA 1143, xv:456). Folk songs, for this reason, demand actual musical accompaniment (LFA 1144, xv:458). As the song matures, and its contents grow concrete, allowing poets greater clarity, the lute is set aside (LFA 1138, xv:450). More precisely, the mature modern lyric incorporates its external musicality into its internal melodic, or prosodic, structure. The modern forms of the lyric – the sonnet, the "poem [*Gedicht*]"⁴⁴ – are thus characterized by greater sophistication in the use of rhyme, alliteration, and assonance than are the folk songs of the early romantic era.⁴⁵

Given that he thinks there is relatively little of a theoretical nature to be said about the lyric, Hegel certainly devotes a good amount of time to discussions of the technicalities of versification. Because he largely does without actual examples, however, the discussion is much drier and less informative than his richly illustrated discussions of figurative language. The final point that merits discussion here is the idea that "rhyme is the authentic form of romantic art" (1820, Ms. 242), or at least of romantic poetry. Hegel likes to conceive of the arts as driven by tensions between quantitative and qualitative properties. Following the argument of the *Logic*, the former are more natural, and limited, the latter more spiritual, and free. Theorists of painting, Hegel observes, tended in the eighteenth century to favor either color

⁴⁴ For this distinction, see 1828, Ms. 150a.

⁴⁵ In "cultured poetry, singability disappears but, in compensation ... the language itself in its sounds and ingenious rhymes becomes the notes of a spoken melody" (LFA 1146, xv:460).

or line. Likewise, theorists of music (Rousseau, for instance) set harmony against melody. In the poetic arts, this opposition reappears as that between meter and rhyme, the two “systems of versification” (LFA 1014, xv:292). Greek verse, whether lyric or epic, is governed by its meter alone, and remains (strikingly) unrhymed. Other poetic traditions – Arab, Persian, Germanic, Latinate – employ meter, but less systematically. Here the unity of the verse is often underwritten by its rhyme. The most immediate explanation of this phenomenon involves a fairly technical consideration of Greek syntax.⁴⁶ But Hegel thinks that deeper pressures are at work as well. In particular, he argues, romantic poetry is more concerned with meaning than classical poetry (LFA 1027, xv:309). Accordingly, its unity will tend to be governed more by (internal) cognitive features than (external) sensuous ones. Classical verse, which requires a stricter and more legible structure, avails itself of meter (a definite, quantitative property). Romantic verse, which does not require such strictures, turns instead to rhyme, a more deliberate (literally, “thumping”) form of versification (LFA 1028, xv:310). Hegel has an explanation for this as well. Prosodic structure affords a reprieve, as did the Homeric simile, from the poem’s “serious content” (1820, Ms. 240; cf. LFA 1013, xv:291). But given that romantic poetry is richer and darker than classical verse, it readily “gain[s] access to that inwardness and depth of the spirit,” and threatens to trap us in spirals of self-reflection (LFA 1028, xv:310). For this reason, romantic versification requires a more vigorous form. A final point of contact between music and the lyric is the moment of self-relation produced by the recurrence and recollection of formal motifs. In rhymed verse, “the percipient is made conscious of himself and ... recognizes himself as the activity of creation and apprehension and is satisfied” (LFA 1028–9, xv:311), Hegel suggests.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Greek and Latin permit the formation of complex verb forms based on the inflection of a single root or stem; and in such transformations the stress often migrates from the root to some other syllable. Germanic and Romance languages, meanwhile, tend to rely upon auxiliaries and prepositions to generate complex verb forms. This approach tends to leave the stress upon the root syllable, the consequence of which is that the rhythm of the line becomes stiffer and less supple. In order to preserve the coherence of the poem at the sensuous level of the text – in order to versify it, in other words – poets working in the modern languages have accordingly turned to rhyme (LFA 1020–1, xv:300–2).

⁴⁷ Hegel follows A.W. Schlegel here, who argues that the “recollection and divination [*Erinnerung und Ahndung*]” fostered by rhyme contain “the romantic principle, which is opposed to the isolatedness of the plastic [work of art]” (*Vorlesungen*, I, 327).

Love poetry

Having considered lyric form we turn to its broader project, the two-fold nature of which is captured in the opening of Hotho's chapter on the subject. Whereas the epic poet disappears into his work – "Homer is sacrificed as an individual, people no longer even credit him with existence" (1826b, Ms. 87a) – it is the privilege and the duty of the lyric poet to remain in view. He can do so, can resist the "self-alienation" of epic,

if on the one hand he draws into *himself* the entire world of objects and circumstances, and interpenetrates it with the inside of his own consciousness; and if, on the other hand, he discloses his self-concentrated heart, opens his eyes and ears, raises purely dull feeling into vision and ideas, and gives words and language to this enriched inner life so that as inner life it may find expression (LFA 1111, xv:416).

The project of the lyric is thus twofold: the latter project, involving something like the clarification-in-articulation of emotion is the most familiar. The former is more particular to Hegel's thought and is a strategy we have encountered several times as an abstract assertion of authority, it resembles the stone-thrower's stones, the metaphoric stylist's complications of prose, and the painter's ability to freeze the fleeting moment; as a display of virtuosity related to the content, it recalls the *Bild*'s elevation and consecration of its object and the painter's *Belebung* of the scene. Below, in the section on occasional verse, we will take up the poet's efforts to "draw into himself the entire world" and "interpenetrate it with the inside of his own consciousness." For the moment, we begin with the poetry of love and the effort to "raise purely dull feeling into vision and ideas." Along the way, we will consider Petrarch's sonnets as a sort of antidote to Romantic longing.

The project of expression is, in the first instance, that of objectification and clarification. Hegel sketches this possibility in his comments on Goethe's *Werther*.⁴⁸ As a young man, the story goes, Goethe had found himself trapped in a love triangle, oppressed by desires he failed to grasp. He is able to free himself only by projecting these feelings on to Werther, a fictional proxy.⁴⁹ Goethe had referred to

⁴⁸ The fact that this is a novel, rather than a lyric poem, does not alter the point at present – *Werther* is simply the most famous instance of the sort of thing Hegel has in mind – though it may cast suspicion on Hegel's rather limited theory of the novel (discussed later in this chapter).

⁴⁹ Hegel was fond of this example. He mentions it in the *Encyclopedia* and again in the *Aesthetics* (LFA 203–4, XIII:266).

this procedure in his autobiography as his “old household remedy [*altes Hausmittel*],” a term that Hegel picks up and reuses in the lectures.⁵⁰ “What at first is firmly retained only inwardly is released,” Hegel observes of the novel, “and becomes an external object from which the man has freed himself, as tears make it easier when grief weeps itself out” (LFA 204, XIII:266). Tears, however, effect a merely mechanical release; in art, liberation is contemplative. “The blind dominion of passion lies in an unconscious and dull unity between itself and the entirety of a heart that cannot rise out of itself into ideas and self-expression. Poetry [delivers] the heart from this slavery to passion by making it see itself” (LFA 1112, XV:417). To borrow a more contemporary vocabulary, desires are candidate reasons for action. When these desires remain obscure, it is difficult for the agent to gear actions to reasons. Unable to understand his actions as rational, he remains enslaved by passion. The lyric poet breaks this cycle by individuating and describing desires, and thus permitting them to re-enter the orbit of conscious reflection. Hegel’s interest in the clarification of the emotions belongs to a tradition of thought in moral psychology reaching from Spinoza – for whom an idea “ceases to be a passion” as soon as we “form a clear and distinct idea of [it]”⁵¹ – to Freud and R.G. Collingwood.⁵²

It can sound at points as if the clarification of feeling amounts for Hegel to its mere extinction. “The lyric poem is ... liberation from feeling,” he argues in the earliest series of lectures; “spirit is freed from it” (1820, Ms. 253). Some readers have taken statements like these to suggest an intellectualist hostility to the life of feeling.⁵³ But if such hostility is present in Kant,⁵⁴ as Schiller pointed out, and if it lingers

50 *Goethes Werke* (Hamburg: Christian Wegner, 1967), IX:588.

51 *Ethics*, Part V, Proposition 3.

52 Like Hegel, Collingwood views expression as involving the mind’s progressive reinterpretation and rationalization of mere behavior (*The Principles of Art* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958], 235).

53 Hegel’s comments on objective humor are offered “in the best tradition of the ascetic ideals of Platonism and Christianity,” Bungay suggests (*Beauty and Truth*, 187). Robert Wicks agrees (“Hegel’s Aesthetics: An Overview” in F.C. Beiser, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993], 358).

54 “To be subject to affects and passions is probably always an illness of the mind, because both affect and passion shut out the sovereignty of reason ... [N]o human being wishes to have passion. For who wants to have himself put in chains when he can be free?” (*Anthropology*, 149, 151, Ak. VII:251, 253). “All *Affect* is blameworthy as such” (*Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991], 183). Feeling plays no role in Kant’s discussion of poetry.

in Fichte, as is noted in the *Differenzschrift*, Hegel of course rejects such rigorism in art⁵⁵ and life.⁵⁶ His further discussion of the lyric reveals that the process of freeing oneself *from* feeling, as he says in the passage cited above, is but one moment in a broader movement of reconciliation. There is something limited, after all, about Goethe's notion: "If ... the heart can find relief when its grief or pleasure is put, described and expressed in words of any sort" – in Freud and Breuer's talking cure – "then a poetic outpouring can certainly perform the like service. Such an outpouring, however, does not limit itself to its use as a household remedy [*Hausmittel*]." Poetry

has on the contrary a higher vocation: its task, namely, is to free the spirit not *from* but *in* feeling. The blind dominion of passion lies in an unconscious and dull unity between itself and the entirety of a heart that cannot rise out of itself into ideas and self-expression. Poetry does deliver the heart from this slavery by making it see itself (*sich gegenständlich werden*), but it does not stop at merely extricating this content from its immediate unity with the subject; rather, it makes of it an object purified from all accidents of mood, an object in which the inner life, set free and with its self-consciousness satisfied, reverts freely at the same time into itself and is at home with itself (LFA 1112, xv:417).

The poet's aim is not to evaporate the life of feeling and its claims upon the agent, but to make that life habitable, to free her not from her passions but, somehow, *in* them. Roughly, we have here a distinction between negative and positive forms of freedom that is tied to two notions of clarification. On the one hand, we may simply want to know what the feeling is that oppresses us. Seeing it objectified, something other than ourselves, its grip on us is loosened. This is poetry as medicine, as a sort of emetic. But the remedy is crude. I may realize perfectly well that my anxieties derive, say, from a wish to please my parents, and yet suffer them unabated. On the other hand, it may occur to me that my deepest interests and desires spring not from

55 In Goethe's novels, "the feeling is the true thing" (1820, Ms. 254). "Pathos," in fact, "forms the proper centre, the true domain, of art" (LFA 232, xiii:302; 1826a, Ms. 103).

56 Hegel criticizes Fichte for valuing art as a means of withdrawing from feeling. More generally, "Nothing great has been and nothing great can be accomplished without passion ... It is only a dead, too often, indeed, a hypocritical moralizing which inveighs against the form of passion as such" (PM §474, x:296).

the excellence of their objects (my spouse, my job), but rather from contingent accidents of my own personality. Alienation threatens on both fronts: feelings that must be repressed (or medicated) cannot seem “my own”; idiosyncratic desires, on the other hand, are *merely* mine, and thus not something to which I could lay a *reflective* claim.⁵⁷ In either case, Hegel suspects, frustration may tempt me to understand my own humanity, with Kant and Augustine, as a predicament – a mind or soul athwart a kind of animal. The lyric procedure seems here to involve a re-examination of feeling that sorts the idiosyncrasy (neurosis, habit, personal incident) from the central currents of feeling Hegel refers to as the *pathē*,⁵⁸ and yields a feeling “purified from all accidents of mood” – a sense, for instance, that even in his wish to seduce an affianced young woman, the young Goethe had been moved by something rational, by a desire he could come to see as his own and not something besieging him from outside (the culture, the devil, the id, and so on).⁵⁹

The desires that confront the poet are, as here, often erotic, and the fact that love “plays a paramount role in modern [*neueren*] art” (1820, Ms. 122) is sharpened by the fact that it “does not occur in classical art” (LFA 563, XIV:183).⁶⁰ Why? In formal terms, painting’s spatiality

57 For discussions of what it would mean for an agent to be “in” her actions, or to see them as her own, see Pinkard, “Virtues, Morality, Sittlichkeit,” *European Journal of Philosophy*, 7, 2 1999, and Pippin, “Naturalness and Mindedness: Hegel’s Compatibilism,” reprinted in his *Hegel’s Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency As Ethical Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

58 A pathos is a “*universal* and substantive power of action” as this is “actualiz[ed in] human individuality.” In other words, it is a kind or current of feeling – jealousy, cunning, wisdom, pride – deep enough to govern an entire personality, and thus to shape from it a “character” (LFA 236, XIII:306). Though of central importance in epic and drama, the poetry of action, it must be developed “even in lyric poetry where yet the ‘pathos’ cannot come into action in concrete affairs” (LFA 239–40, XIII:311).

59 Passions are based, in part, “on the rational nature of the mind” (PM §474, x:296). Likewise, feeling is not the opposite of reason, but its implicit form: *Leidenschaft* is “etwas Substantielles des Gemüts” (1826b, Ms. 80a). As usual, Hegel subordinates here; he does not oppose. And as commentators like Pippin and Pinkard have suggested, this subordination is not ontological – spirit and nature are not two different kinds of thing – but reflective, a matter of the relative degrees of coherence and self-sufficiency, or “presuppositionlessness,” that distinguish humans from animals or cognition from sensation. Consider Pippin, for instance, on the difficult notion of “soul”: “What is striking is that there is no suggestion that ‘overcoming the immediacy of nature’ reflects anything non-natural. *Natural* beings *accomplish* this new position towards and in relation to nature, and soul just *is* that accomplishment” (“Naturalness and Mindedness: Hegel’s Compatibilism,” 198).

60 “[T]he spirit of love must hover everywhere invisibly visible in romantic poetry” (F. Schlegel, “Letter on the Novel” in J.M. Bernstein, ed., *Classic and Romantic German*

lends its scenes a certain public quality – an interest in work, street scenes, and social class. Literature, we have seen, is the most formally ideal of the arts, and the lyric, which does away with the linear narratives and classical unities that structure epic and drama, is the most ideal art of all. Its unlocated play of reflections is formally suited to rendering the inner life – the associative movements of the mind, for instance, or the lover’s hunger for images, each of which fails to properly capture the virtues of the beloved. In substantial terms, erotic love embodies both the intimacy, or *Innigkeit*, of romantic art in general⁶¹ and the contingency of post-romantic subjects in particular.⁶² In general, it matters to the modern citizen, as it did not to the classical hero, how one *feels* about oneself and one’s ideals. “The right of the subject’s *particularity* to find satisfaction, or ... the right of *subjective freedom*,” Hegel observes in the *Philosophy of Right*, “is the pivotal and focal point in the difference between *antiquity* and the *modern age*.” The “specific shapes” of this right include, alongside “the eternal salvation of the individual as an end,” “love” and “the romantic.”⁶³

Of the historical schools of lyric that Hegel singles out for attention, the Renaissance Italian and the medieval Persian, the former is certainly the less controversial, and Hegel’s admiration for Petrarch was certainly influenced by the writings of Jean Paul, Goethe, and A.W. Schlegel, among others.⁶⁴ Petrarch’s great sonnet cycle, or “songbook,” the *Canzoniere*, is devoted by turns to praising the beautiful Laura, the pubescent noblewoman he loves, and to detailing the torments she causes him. In itself, the idea of star-crossed love leaves Hegel fairly

Aesthetics [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003], 291). Schelling: “Modern lyric poetry was at its inception consecrated to love.” The ancient lyric, celebrating friendship, competition, and public life, is comparatively “objective” (*Philosophy of Art*, 210).

61 The romantic era as a whole distinguishes itself from the classical in the ethical significance it accords to love, initially the love of God. “It is this love,” Hegel argues, “which comprises the inwardness [*Innigkeit*], the soulfulness, the substance of the modern ... [and] which takes the place of the ancient Ideal” (1820, Ms. 198).

62 Erotic love is “something contingent, something lucky” (*ibid.*; cf. LFA 566–8, xiv:188–90).

63 PR §124.

64 Petrarch, delicate in sentiments, strong and holy in life” is the discoverer of “sensitivity,” according to Jean Paul (*Horn*, 289). Goethe dedicated to him the penultimate poem of his 1808 sonnet cycle, which he had begun at the instigation of A.W. Schlegel, whose “favorite lyric poet” was Petrarch (Ernst Behler, *Frühromantik* [Berlin: De Gruyter, 1992], 83). Hegel’s richest discussions of Petrarch come from the 1820 lectures, though he still ranks beside Goethe, Hafiz, and Rückert in 1828.

dry-eyed. Love is, after all, a matter of contingency, and if “every man does have a heart for love and a right to become happy through it,” nonetheless “if here, precisely in this instance, under such and such circumstances, he does not achieve his end in relation to precisely this girl, then no wrong has occurred” (LFA 568, XIV:190). Petrarch’s excellence, and that of Italian poetry in general, is his implicit recognition of this fact. As the reader works through the *Canzoniere*, what he comes to realize, Hegel thinks, is that the speaker does not actually desire that his desire be satisfied – at least, he does not desire it crudely or literally.⁶⁵ On the one hand, it is precisely this elusiveness, this impossibility of satisfaction, that in the poetry of Romanticism constitutes the sublimity of the desired thing, of Novalis’s blue flower or of the melodies of Keats’s urn, sweeter because unheard. But Petrarch’s speaker is not this sort of Romantic. Novalis takes the lover’s failure as emblematic of the more general impossibility of satisfaction with his world, and expresses this impossibility as a sort of fact. Petrarch, meanwhile, acknowledges the lover’s sense of failure but contains it, as it were, in the brilliant satisfactions of the verse.

To see how this works, consider that Hegel takes very seriously the fact that we learn almost nothing – “only very little information” (LFA 276, XIII:357) – about the beloved to whom the poems are addressed. This observation prompts him to cite approvingly Klopstock’s comment to the effect that Petrarch’s songs, though “beautiful to their admirer,” are, “to the lover, nothing” (LFA 610, XIV:241). They are nothing to the lover because they fail to address her as a particular person. Critics, in fact, have long entertained the view that she did not actually exist, that the name “Laura” is in fact a play on the word “laurel” – the leaves that graced Petrarch’s head as poet laureate – and has nothing to do with an actual girl.⁶⁶ In reflecting upon and describing his experience, Petrarch has reclaimed the desired object on his own terms. As such, his “love is in possession of that which it loves, and thus in possession of something independent from actuality” (1820, Ms. 199). What it loves is Laura, of course, but the Laura it possesses is a figment. “[T]he expression itself is the satisfaction,” Hegel says (LFA 874, XV:113–14). The poem is the sex.

65 “[I]t is not for the actual possession of its object that the longing of the heart struggles” (LFA 874, XV:113).

66 Sara Sturm-Maddox, *Petrarch’s Laurels* (State College: Penn State University Press, 1992), 1–3.

The Italian lyric thus yields precisely the freedom not from but in feeling mentioned above: it affords the “pleasure of letting oneself go amid one’s various relations with feeling” wherein “[t]he desire is not simply to reject one’s feelings, but to consider them as well, and in this considering [*Vernehmen*] to find reassurance” (1820, Ms. 256). What sort of reassurance? In the “mourning, laments, descriptions, memories, and fancies” of Petrarch’s verse, we find “a longing that satisfies itself as longing” – *eine Sehnsucht die sich als Sehnsucht befriedigt* (LFA 874, XV:114). Formally, this movement of return into the self is that of ardor or intimacy (*Innigkeit*). Substantively, longing is “satisfied as longing,” because it testifies to the experience, central to human life, of having longed. The thought may be nothing new – it is better to have loved and lost, or, rather, to have loved and never had – but the logic of desire is for Hegel something entirely original. We can see at work both of the movements of the lyric distinguished at the beginning of this section. On the one hand, we have a case in which the poet takes up the world around him and transfigures it in imagination: the Laura of the poems is both a particular twelve-year-old and the beloved as such; moreover, she is perhaps a figure for poetic achievement itself. On the other hand, we have a clarification of emotion in which the poet realizes that he desires not Laura herself, but the very experience of desire. Longing is satisfied *as longing*, desire is “purified” of its contingency. The poet “places his entire essence, his being in the beloved,” and yet “integrat[es]” at the same time his sense of “love’s looseness [*Leichtigkeit*],” his sense that mere desire “is sensuous and condemnable [*verwerflich*]” (1820, Ms. 124). When the rational core of irrational desire is discovered, the work of longing is itself recognized as having deepened and enriched the speaker’s life and made possible the singing of the *Canzoniere* itself.⁶⁷ And yet he shows us how little this all matters. Petrarch writes the *Canzoniere* in Italian, the vulgate, reserving his Latin, in Hegel’s words, for “what he considered important” (1820, Ms. 123).

The emphasis on self-reflexive *Sehnsucht* suggests, moreover, that Hegel conceived his presentation of the Petrarchan lyric not only in opposition to, but as a kind of therapy for, the standpoint of the Romantic sublime. To the lover, the contingent, the “finite” relation

67 A parallel to the central theme of Italian painting, Mary’s loss of Jesus and realization of Christ, is suggested by Hegel’s treatment of Italian art in general as characterized by “blissful independence and freedom of soul in love” (LFA 874, XV:114).

of his love “must appear as something incomplete, something which can and must be lost.” Romantic love “thus contains a negativity, an elevation to a beyond” (1820, Ms. 198), an opening to dissatisfaction and longing. And it was to “negativity” that “Solger firmly clung” (LFA 68, XIII:99). Admittedly, it is only in the erotic realm that Petrarch manages his satisfaction of longing, and if Schopenhauer’s dissatisfactions sprang, as Nietzsche likes to suggest, from his frustrations as a lover, Solger’s are conceivably more deeply grounded. Nonetheless, the model of longing satisfied as longing not only points to a promising tradition in the lyric but relates back to his work on modern art in general. The strategy of the genre painter, after all, involves the same doubling back upon the obstacle at hand. The genre painter overcomes the repugnance of daily life not by evading or ennobling it, but by committing himself to it, by way of a painterly *Sichseinleben*. The poet seeks to overcome the frustrations of love not by medicating her sorrows, not by swallowing a *Hausmittel*, but precisely by exploring them, by way of the poetic *Sichvertiefen* we considered in the case of the image and the simile.

The shortcoming of Hegel’s discussion of Petrarch is its vagueness. He seems not to know the work very well, none of which he cites, and he seems more comfortable speaking of the Italian temperament in general than discussing Petrarch’s particular contributions to it. Nor is Petrarch often read today, so that apart from certain generalities about Laura’s quasi-realism, it is difficult for most readers to side with or against Hegel’s view. A deeper shame, and not only for his English-speaking readership, is that Hegel seems to have been unfamiliar with Shakespeare’s Sonnets, a lyric cycle by an author he admired enormously and one that is concerned not only with quasi-real lovers but that seems to bear out with particular force the account of romantic poetry Hegel wishes to defend. Romantic art is concerned above all with the fleeting and trivial, Hegel often observes, and it is this same concern – the poet’s obsession with impermanence and decay, with beauty that will fade and beauty that will endure – that lends the Sonnets their controlling metaphors. More importantly, the tension between the praise of the beloved and the nimble performance of the lover is particularly acute here. The famous claim of Sonnet 18, for instance, is that the lover’s beauty, his “eternal summer,” will be preserved in the poem itself: “So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see” – a poem can be recited or it can be read – “So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.” But the poet who wishes to praise the beloved

cannot avoid the problem that Pindar and his athletes faced. What is it that will live forever: the athlete's virtues, or the poet's? An ambiguity in the very next sonnet, number 19, quietly raises this problem. The poet has been pleading and remonstrating with swift-footed Time to leave his beloved's beauty untouched – "O carve not with thy hours my love's fair brow, / Nor draw no lines there with thine antique pen" – when, in the couplet, he suddenly exchanges his appeals for a boasting challenge: "Yet do thy worst, old Time: despite thy wrong, / My love shall in my verse ever live young." The line wishes to present itself as a forceful conclusion, but the slant rhyme and the faltering rhythm of the final three words lends it a curiously quiet, inward, reflective air. And it is on reflection that we realize that the poet's "love" is itself ambiguous here: will the poet's *lover* live forever, or will the poet's *own love* be ever young? If the latter is the case, as Shakespeare knew it was, we begin to see his earlier challenge to Time in a new light. By taking up his "antique pen," Time threatens to become not a violator of the beloved but a rival bard. Longing is again satisfied in private. The poet laureate is not the one who has slept with Laura, but the one who wears the laurels – laurels that used to go to athletes.

Occasional verse

We have considered Hegel's sketch, in the case of Petrarch's Sonnets to Laura, of a model of reconciliation in matters of the heart that offers a way past Novalisian *Sehnsucht*. But there is a broader challenge that the lyric poet takes on. The lyric, as Wellbery observed, is the poetry of contingency. And this, too, is something Hegel thought: "All lyric poems in particular are occasional poems" (1828, Ms. 37a).⁶⁸ Considering what this means will allow us to develop a second account of the value and the modernity of the lyric.

Hegel's history of the form suggests to him that the lyric was in its classical phase, as the Pindaric ode, literally occasional: dedicated, that is, to the commemoration of public events. But to say that all poetry is occasional is simply to suggest that it is all contingent in the sense of owing its existence to something outside itself. In the modern era, this sense of occasion shifts, of course. The poet is no longer asked to versify on command (unless, ironically, he is the poet laureate). And yet though the occasions for her writing are now, as it

68 "Lyric poetry: Its object is the particular object ... [the] occasion" (1826a, Ms. 420).

seems, entirely her own – she is moved by this or that thought, or reminiscence, or feeling – they are also, in a sense, just as little her own as before. For what is the status of this inner life, of the steady flicker of attention to this or that? Hegel does not distinguish them explicitly – claims, indeed, that occasionality is the essence of lyric as such – but we can begin here to see a distinction between the poetry of love and what we might call the poetry of contingency as such. Certainly it is a matter of chance whether this woman will love this man, but the aspiration to romantic love itself is a central human project. Marriage is an organ of the state, after all, and an instrument, more or less, of freedom. But the whims of a mind or eye at play – “the quickly passing flashes of carefree happiness and merriment, the outbursts of melancholy, dejection, and lament – in short the whole gamut of feeling” (LFA 1114–15, xv:420–1) – appear utterly contingent, unconstrained by any broader project of freedom.

Here is the sense in which *Herz* and *Innere* do differ. The heart is an organ of feeling, and feeling, as pathos, is already implicitly rational. But the inner life is simply the organ of selfhood, of being a mind or having a point of view. There is a whole realm of interiority, an undiscovered country of daydreams, notions, peevs, and so on that Shakespeare first began to explore in soliloquies that slowed to a lyric pause, unfolding inwardness in those “redundant” chains of imagery discussed in the previous chapter. The poetry of contingency that takes up and pursues this project is certainly familiar. As Christ’s calvary is the painted epic and the Pietà the painted drama, so “there comes into [lyric] poetry something like what I mentioned earlier in connection with genre painting. The content of what is said, the topics, are wholly accidental, and the important thing is only the poet’s treatment and presentation of them” (LFA 1115, xv:421). In one sense, the lyric is less radical than genre painting, for its classical pedigree stands as an implicit answer to the felt objection – can *this* be art? – that Hegel thinks we feel before scenes of tobacco-chewing or instruction on the lute. But it is also much deeper and more various. If genre painting is the art of public contingency – waiting for the train, doing one’s job, going for a beer – then the lyric is the art of private contingency. The lyric poet is not “troubled by mundane affairs” here, or “enwrapped in the cares of life” (LFA 882, xv:124), as are the burghers of Dutch art. He is simply trying to figure out what to make of all the things that travel through his head, with the fact that the faces in the metro look like petals on a wet, black bough or that he regrets a theft

of refrigerated plums. What is more, occasional thoughts like these – notions, or *Einfälle* – will seem only stranger and more valuable to us as modernity deepens its grip: “the individual becomes increasingly aware of his poetic inner life within a world already more prosaically stamped” (LFA 1123, xv:431).

The poet, as we have seen, must resist this world of prose with that aggressively figurative style, that “more deliberate energy” discussed above. Hegel seems to have this negative moment in mind when he says, for instance, that “Folk-song precedes the proper development and presence of a prosaic type of consciousness; whereas genuinely lyric poetry, as *art*, tears itself free from this already existent world of prose, and out of an imagination now become subjectively independent creates a new poetic world” (LFA 1127, xv:436–7). One way in which poetry tears itself free is by being difficult, by exchanging the sequential logic of narrative for “lyrical leaps,” or “transitions, with no intermediary, from one idea to another far removed from it” (LFA 1135, xv:447).⁶⁹ Pendant to this negative gesture, of course, is the reconstitution of coherence, and the challenge for an art of contingency is to manage this without a collapse into virtuosity alone. In Dutch art, the painter’s technical brilliance somehow bound the elements of the scene together, lending them an appearance of necessity that the viewer in turn conferred upon the unity of the painted subject with her own trivial task.

Virtuosity remains central to romantic verse: “precisely appropriate to lyric are digressions . . . surprising turns of phrase, witty combinations, and sudden and almost violent transitions,” Hegel says. The genre painter donated to the picture that sense of dynamic activity, or “subjective liveliness,” that animated his own relationship to the art of painting. In the case of the lyric, Hegel’s language is just the same; an ability to manage those violent transitions without “disrupt[ing] the unity of the poem” suggests that “*Lebendigkeit* belongs to the poet’s inner life” (LFA 1134–5, xv:446). As ever, the mention of virtuosity raises the specter of irony, and it is interesting to note the proximity of Hegel’s formulation of Goethe’s project (“what matters, what he brings into a poetic intuition, is his own poet’s life [*Dichterleben*]” [1826b, Ms. 87a]) to his account of Schlegel’s (“The ironic subject is the artist himself, his life is an artistic expression of his individuality” [1826b, Ms. 7]). Because the lyric requires something like sincerity, it

69 For examples of this, see the reading of Goethe’s “Wiederfinden” in the section “Two poems” in [chapter 5](#).

is particularly subject to fraudulence, to the counterfeiting of passion or its loss in mere cultivation.⁷⁰ In drama, by contrast, the chief threat is simply triviality: “two peasants, two grooms, and yet another glass of schnapps” (LFA 272, XIII:351). But technical brilliance is not the only way for the center to hold. In the lyric, the roles of the animating artist and the mundane subject that had remained separate in painting are united, nearly, in the voice of the first-person speaker.⁷¹ The brilliant technician and the dreaming citizen are one. And this provides the poet an opportunity, one not available to the painter, to develop something like a persona, a presence that has content, a point of view.⁷²

The development of lyric involved a movement from the anonymity of the hymn to the truce, in the ode, between the poet and the culture whose festivals he both celebrated and used as a platform for his creativity, to the complete release of the poet in the song, the form of the lyric in general. “[W]e find in the lyric that the individual as such steps forth; the singer is the focal point” and “makes himself presentable [*darstellig*]” (1826b, Ms. 87). He becomes the protagonist of an indefinite drama or the hero of a private epic: “er macht sich zur Hauptperson” (1826b, Ms. 87a).⁷³ Hegel tends to put the point this way. Lyric is a negotiation between big-picture views of life, the state of the world, and so on, and diaristic records of episodes of feeling: “both the constituents are mere abstractions which need a link if they are to acquire a living [*lebendige*] lyrical individuality . . . Thus as the center and proper content of lyric poetry there must be placed the poetic concrete person, the poet” (LFA 1129, xv:439). The same problem of center and periphery arises in the case of the collection or the

70 The poet must “reveal the ideas and meditations of a lyrical work of art as *something that fills his own soul and is felt by himself*” (LFA 1038, xv:322, emphasis mine; cf. 1125, xv:433). Klopstock’s “patriotic” efforts and “Protestant firmness” earn him praise (LFA 1155, 1156, xv:472, 473), but his enthusiasm for Wotan and company “often becomes something manufactured.” Horace, on the other hand, is often “lacking in warmth, and he has an imitative artistry which seeks in vain to conceal the more or less calculated finesse of his composition” (LFA 1142, xv:455).

71 Hegel is savvy enough not to conflate them entirely. In Goethe’s “convivial songs,” for instance, he “is, as it were, an actor who plays an endless number of parts” (LFA 1121–2, xv:429).

72 Rembrandt’s self-portraits would be a close analogue to lyric in this sense, but Hegel seems not to have been familiar with them.

73 The importance of this point seems to shift for Hegel. Consistent with the 1823 lectures’ marked suspicion of individual, “humoristic” virtuosity, Hegel has little to say about the individuality of the poet, an emphasis that is much more clearly marked three years later.

oeuvre.⁷⁴ Given their brevity, lyric poems tend to appear in collections, and the source of their coherence is, for Hegel, principally the poet himself. “The circle [*Kreis*] of his poems sets forth the circle of his life” (1826b, Ms. 87a; see LFA 1131, xv:441–2). Even where such collections are organized by an object or a theme, these remain impressionistic and ungoverned by the (epic) unity of action as well as the (dramatic) unities of time and place (LFA 1164–7, xv:482–6). Readers of Goethe’s *Divan* are thus more likely to seek its unity in the persona of its author than are readers of *Don Quixote* or viewers of *Macbeth*.⁷⁵

Hegel does not have quite enough to say about how this poetic self is created in the work and how the reader interacts with it, though a few indications are present. The sense of commitment to the ordinary that the painter showed in his passages of virtuoso painting is replaced in the lyric by the poet’s decision to “carry himself as a maker of poems [*sich ... als dichtend verhält*].” Thus Hafiz “carries himself as a maker of poems in this [prosaic] realm of life” and Goethe “in the multiplicity [of life] always carried himself as a maker of poems” (1826b, Ms. 87a). The verb *dichten* appears here in the participial form three times, suggesting a practice, an attitude toward life; one is a poet not only because one writes poems but because one lives in such a way that poems emerge from it. “Goethe above all has in recent times had an affection for this kind of poetry because in fact every occurrence in life became a poem for him” (LFA 1118, xv:425).⁷⁶

In approaching Hegel’s account of the lyric, I have drawn a provisional distinction between two aspects of the poet’s project. In the first of these, the redemption of longing, the poet works to clarify desires – to “raise purely dull feeling into vision and ideas” (LFA 1111, xv:416) – in order that their incipient rationality may be discerned and acknowledged. Romantic love is fraught with chance – Petrarch

74 Schelling: Petrarch’s sonnets are “works of art, not only in their individual elements, but also as a whole” (*Philosophy of Art*, 211).

75 Lovers of Shakespeare’s plays will no doubt take a great interest in knowing more about their author. But this interest is largely the *result* of having already understood the work, and less an element, as with the *Canzoniere* and Goethe’s *Divan*, in that understanding itself. “I was misled by my acquaintance with more modern poets into first looking for the poet in the work,” Schiller says of Shakespeare, “encountering *his* heart and reflecting in common with *him* on his subject matter. In short, I was misled into looking at the object in the subject” (*Essays*, 197).

76 Goethe’s making everything into a poem is closely related to the idea of memory as a making inward, an *Erinnerung*, of what was outer. “Great individuals are almost always signalized by a great memory,” he notes (LFA 281–2, xiii:364), and lyric “must look for its justification in the fact that it becomes alive in the poet’s subjective memory [*Erinnerung*] and gift for agile combination” (LFA 1133, xv:443).

fell in love with a teenager, after all – and yet the experience of such reciprocity, of being-at-home-in-another, remains a modern aspiration. Contingent yet necessary, love remains “justified, but not absolutely justified” (1823, Ms. 178), in Hegel’s curious phrase, and the sonneteer can show us why. The second aspect of the lyric project, the redemption of contingency, involves the poet in an effort to appropriate and enliven the materials of common experience, to “draw into himself the entire world of objects and circumstances and interpenetrate it with the inside of his own consciousness” (LFA 1111, xv:416).

Though it recalls, and perhaps draws upon, the account of the painter whose virtuosic style reanimates his humble subjects, this second project depends, as I read Hegel, upon the creation of a persona. “[T]he truly lyrical poet lives in himself [lebt in sich],” he observes, and “treats circumstances in accordance with his own poetic individual outlook” (LFA 1118, xv:425). A poet’s oeuvre, in other words, is the autobiography of a temperament, the discovery of a point of view from which the elements of a life appear maximally aligned. The persona serves the poet, and perhaps the reader, as a point of orientation amid contingency, so that “however variously his inner life may be fused with the world confronting him and with its situations, complexities, and fates,” the poet “manifests in his portrayal of this material ... only the inherent and self-sufficient *Lebendigkeit* of his feelings and meditations” (LFA 1118, xv:425).

Epic poems give us a world, but in the lyric the world is a sort of prop, an occasion for the poet to demonstrate the versatility and coherence of his own persona. (“Poetry makes nothing happen,” Auden offers in his ode to Yeats; it is rather “a way of happening, a mouth.”⁷⁷ Hegel would agree.) The lyric can be thought of as a series of minor genres, each devoted to one of life’s common occasions – dawn in an aubade, night in a nocturne, flowers in a spring poem, and so on – and Hegel’s account encourages us to conceive the challenge of a given lyric, and the source of its *Lebendigkeit*, as that of taking up one of these traditional forms and remaking it in a way that is convincingly the poet’s own. What would a sunset poem from Schiller look like, or a *carpe diem* poem from Goethe? Where the reinvention is successful, it is not so much the poet’s originality we admire as it is the exemplary coherence of his point of view. An “object or circumstance” that had seemed cramped and lifeless now strikes us as available for reflection and

77 “In Memory of W.B. Yeats,” *Selected Poems* (New York: Vintage International, 1989), 82.

absorption: “interpenetrated,” in Hegel’s phrase, “with the inside of [the poet’s] own consciousness.” The world of prose appears, momentarily, as one in which we could find ourselves at home.

A further point: the lyric poet’s achievement of an exemplary individuality can help soften the impression gathered by many of Hegel’s readers that he is a philosopher of collectives and communities who has distressingly little to say about the standpoint of the individual. In the *Aesthetics*, for instance, he is sometimes taken to mean that the work of art is best thought of as the expression of a communal spirit – paradigmatically, architectural or dramatic works that involve ensemble creation or performance⁷⁸ – and thus appears out of step with the contemporary march of pluralism. As noted above, however, the signal achievements of the modern poet are characterized by singularity, not unicity, of voice. It is the tragedian who must speak *for* the community. As a writer of lyrics, by contrast, Goethe’s voice speaks *to* us while remaining fundamentally his own.⁷⁹ We can come to occupy Goethe’s standpoint – a way of seeing, not a mandatory claim – as we can occupy the poem’s indexical “I.”⁸⁰ And this is perhaps the clearest single reason why the lyric comes to prominence in the Reformation’s wake. Though it “can flourish abundantly in the most different epochs,” it is “especially opportune in modern times when every individual claims the right of having his own personal point of view and mode of feeling” (LFA 1124, xv:432).

Hegel has also been taken to offer in the *Philosophy of Right* a deeply illiberal view on which an “organic” state swallows and digests individual rights. “The traditional polemic against Hegel,” Allen Wood observes, is that “he is concerned only with the actualization of states or fantastic supra-personal entities, not with the self-actualization of individuals.”⁸¹

78 R.T. Eldridge gestures toward this view in *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 74 ff.

79 Dewey captures the image of the paradigmatically individual artist in sharply material terms. In his view, industrial capitalism has removed the artist from the chain of production and from the integration in the community he used to enjoy (*Art As Experience*, 8–9). This is compatible with Hegel’s view insofar as the developments Dewey points to are already contained, in germ, in Hegel’s conception of the modern state.

80 The idea that the “I” of the lyric poem is written in order to be uttered aloud, and thus appropriated, by the reader is a commonplace. See, e.g., Helen Vendler, *Poems, Poets, Poetry* (New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 14.

81 Allen Wood, “Does Hegel Have an Ethics?”, *Monist*, 74, 3 (1991). Wood and others have sought to counter this view, showing that Hegel is in fact attentive to the ethical demands placed upon the individual (those, for instance, deriving from the call of conscience). See Wood, *Hegel’s Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

Hegel is certainly dubious regarding prospects for the robust realization of modern selves. In a culture ruled not by excellence but by expertise, recall, the individual “must all the more forget himself, as the nature of science implies and requires.” But the centrality of the lyric in modern life suggests that if self-realization cannot always take place in the practical domain – if “the share in the total work of Spirit which falls to the individual can only be very small”⁸² – it remains available in the reflective activity of art. Given the risks of failure, there is something courageous about the lyric. The poet “depicts himself as a hero who, innocent and free and therefore without restriction or deficiency, is merely this one man who he is” (LFA 1121, xv:428). It might seem odd to align Goethe with Ajax, but what the two share is the power of self-determination, the “self-sufficiency [*Selbständigkeit*]” Goethe and Schiller achieve in their verse (1826b, Ms. 243). The hero’s self-sufficiency is public and objective; as the founder of the social order to which he belongs, his actions are justified by definition. Accordingly, his life appears to him as something sealed and whole: the unique expression of a unique personality. The lyric poet’s autarky is possible only in reflection: he remains “independent by being in himself an enclosed inner world” (LFA 1115, xv:421).⁸³ By stamping each “occasion” with the mark of his persona, the poet presents his life as a kind of whole: improvised, but integrated. He is “a man of his own sort as a subjective work of art” (LFA 1121, xv:428).

Song and nation

The *Lied*, in a view Hegel adapts from Herder, is a development of the folk song.⁸⁴ Folk songs are ephemeral things – “who still knows and sings the songs that everyone knew and loved fifty years ago?” – and yet in the moment of their popularity they bring a nation together. In fact, songs are only “of a genuine kind” when they have been “universally sung in their own day” (LFA 1144, xv:457). For this reason, “it

82 PhS §72.

83 The heroism of the lyric poet appeared to Hegel’s contemporaries to have some basis in historical fact. As August Schlegel observes, in a passage Schelling will borrow, lyric poetry “developed at the same time as republicanism; indeed, it may be added that the heyday of both was the same. For Pindar, one of the last lyricists, lived in the time of the Persian War ... It was natural that along with the states [*Staaten*], poetry would individualize itself as well” (*Vorlesungen*, II, 243–4; cf. Schelling, *Philosophy of Art*, 209).

84 Herder’s work on the subject, which eventually included two of Goethe’s own folk songs, is the anthology *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern*.

is in song that particular national differences and the special characteristics of individual poets are most completely in evidence” and “every people is most at home and comfortable in its songs” (LFA 1142–3, xv:456; cf. 1826b, Ms. 88). Freed of musical accompaniment and grown subtle, witty, imagistic, the folk song becomes the poetic *Lied* proper, a form which now reincorporates the music of accompaniment into the music of its own prosody and which, importantly, retains the flavors of the nation. The poet, like the ordinary language philosopher, is the “I” who claims to know what we would say, but in doing so he is not the epic poet who sings *to* the people. Schiller, whose dignified verse seems to Hegel self-consciously public, addressed to “an assembly of all the best and most prominent people,” is in fact a much less “national” poet than Goethe, who instead “sing[s] quietly to himself” (LFA 1147, xv:461). This feature of lyric makes it less appealing from the standpoint of a defense of modern art. How can poets speak to the condition of modernity, which is international, if they remain concerned with the mood of the *Volk*? I will return to this question at the outset of the next chapter. The short answer, however, is that German poetry cannot remain entirely insular because it cannot remain entirely Germanic. There is a basic contradiction internal to the national *Stimmung* that demands the mediation of another nation’s way of being. My aim here is to develop an account of that contradiction. Hegel’s sense of the problem evolves in tandem with his account of Goethe’s poetry.

In every lecture series save the last, Goethe is praised for his deeply Germanic tone. In 1823, this is the very fruit of his achievement: his songs “are the most effective [of modern lyrics] because they belong entirely to him and his people. They are his very own; nothing in them is foreign” (1823, Ms. 276; cf. LFA 1157, xv:474). In 1823, this counts as great praise. As we saw in [chapter 1](#), Hegel was particularly concerned in that series of lectures with the problem of foreignness in general in the post-romantic arts, of the case in which the secular artist, uncertain where to draw his materials from, ends up manipulating Christian or classical figures like a “dramatist,” which here means a sort of puppeteer. Goethe has in a sense solved the problem of creating post-religious art by exploring a form, the lyric, which never had any religious content, any characters or iconography, to begin with. The one thing that remains authentically the poet’s, it seems in 1823, is the ethnic mood. Hegel has in mind here poems like

“Erlkönig” and “Der König in Thule” written in the 1770s and 1780s under the influence of the folk songs and ballads which Herder had recommended to Goethe and which were later to have an influence on English verse in the work of Wordsworth.⁸⁵ What is particularly German here is in Hegel’s view the way in which “feeling is concentrated” and “shows itself unable and unwilling to make itself explicit to itself” (1826a, Ms. 427).⁸⁶ The compression of such a wealth of feeling into two dozen words is itself an achievement, and its brevity embodies something about the nature of the lyric itself, which “has *concentration* for its principle” (LFA 1133, xv:444). Still, Hegel’s praise is at the same time quite puzzling. As sketched above, the work of the lyric is to a significant degree not the compression of feeling but its expression and reflective “purification.”

In an important sense, then, the lyric itself is simply at odds with the aims of art. This, at any rate, is the attitude Hegel seems to take earlier in the decade, and which finds expression in Hotho as the idea that “there is present only imperfectly in lyric the essentially necessary thing, namely that the self-concentrated mind shall rise above this pure concentration and its immediate vision and press on to a free portrayal of itself” (LFA 1126, xv:435). In 1826, Goethe is still praised for the Germanic quality of some of his songs, those that “speak only in falling silent [*durch Verstummen*]” and express that inner struggle that is the spiritual condition of savages (*dieser Kampf des Gemüts ist ein barbarischer Zustand*). But if these poems are his “most beautiful” (1826b, Ms. 88), their longing for a purity of heart lapses into pre-Raphaelite nostalgia.⁸⁷ It is instead Goethe’s “social lyrics, cheerful diversions, subjective situations” that “contain his best” (1826a, Ms. 427). Again, the discovery of the *Divan*, “the highest that poetry can achieve” (1826a, Ms. 376), “the height of lyric song” (1828, Ms. 151), reorients Hegel’s sense of post-romantic possibilities. I do not mean to suggest by this that Hegel simply stumbled across the *Divan* and reconceived his account of modern art. In fact, he was already citing

85 Hegel also praises in this vein poems of Goethe’s middle period like “Der Junggesell und der Mühlbach” (1797) and “Schäfers Klagelied” (1804).

86 The best and briefest example, one Hegel does not mention, is the second “Wandrer’s Nachtlied”: “Über allen Gipfeln / Ist Ruh, / In allen Wipfeln / Spürest du / Kaum einen Hauch; / Die Vögelein schweigen in Walde. / Warte nur, balde / Ruhest du auch.” (Over all the hilltops is calm. In all the treetops you feel hardly a breath of air. The little birds fall silent in the woods. Just wait, soon you’ll also be at rest.)

87 “So geht es dann zur Romanze über” (1826b, Ms. 88).

it in his lectures on the philosophy of religion in 1821.⁸⁸ The fact that the work goes unmentioned in 1823 suggests that, apart from enjoying several of its poems, Hegel had not yet developed a view of its contribution to the predicament of German poetics. To appreciate this predicament further, we need to consider what Hegel has to say about the German temperament in his lectures on history and on the history of philosophy.

The notion that the people of a particular culture might have trouble fixing and expressing their emotions, might exhibit a “taciturnity that is tied to a clumsiness in acting and becoming clear to oneself [*sich klar zu werden und zu handeln*]” (1823, Ms. 181), seems to anticipate at first the notion of Victorian prudery that would be axiomatized by Freud and explored in the Edwardian fiction of Forster and Lawrence. In a way, it does. But Hegel’s own genealogy of the German temperament reaches backward, not forward: the same “deep, subjective intensity” we admire in *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet* and in Goethe’s early verse “is actually the character of the barbarians” (1826b, Ms. 54), that is, the Goths, the people native to the forests of central Europe whom the Romans never managed to subdue.⁸⁹ Characteristic of these peoples, and particularly of the Scandinavian and German-speaking nations that resisted conquest, is, as might be expected, a certain stubborn independence. In contrast to the imperial Romans, Hegel says, “there lived in [the German world] an entirely *new spirit*, through which the World was to be regenerated – the free spirit [*freie Geist*], that which reposes in itself – the absolute independent-mindedness [*Eigensinn*] of subjectivity” (LPH 343, XII:415). (Recall from [chapter 1](#) that it is precisely the independence of the *freie Geist* that the great modern artist will require.) It is the task of the Germanic tribes to bring freedom to Europe, first as a bulwark against the Rome of the Caesars and then, as the crucible of the Reformation, as a challenge to the Rome of the Pope.

This independence has to do not with a barbaric will to power but with a national psychology the elements of which are quite familiar to us. “The German nation had in itself the feeling of a natural totality which we can call *Gemüt*,” Hegel says. “*Gemüt* is that undeveloped,

88 LPR 112n131.

89 See Hegel’s discussion of the *Völkerwanderungen* (barbarian migrations) which begin his account of the fourth and final era of universal history, that of the “Christian-Germanic World” (LPH 347 ff., XII:419 ff.).

indeterminate totality of spirit in which, in relation to the will, satisfaction of self is attained in a correspondingly general and indeterminate way.” *Gemütlichkeit*, Hegel’s term for this quality of heartiness or soulfulness in general, is the term translated in [chapter 2](#) as “coziness,” though we can now see that the notion is somewhat broader than the English term had suggested. The opposite of *Gemütlichkeit*, and the quality that defines Romanic peoples like the French and Italians, is one Hegel calls *Charakter*, a “determinate form of the will and interest asserting itself.” As against this practical and worldly ambition, “*Gemütlichkeit* has no determinate goal – riches, honor, or the like – and in fact does not concern itself with any *objective* condition but with the entire condition, the self’s general sense of enjoyment.” It is just because the *Gemüt* does not pursue particular projects, but remains open to chance experience – “*Gemüt* surrenders itself entirely” to “every particular object of attention” – that it manages to enjoy itself, avoiding the sort of “isolation in violent and evil passions” (LPH 350–1, XII:422–4) that trouble the Romanic peoples, the possessors of *Charakter* (LPH 440, XII:521). The Dutch ability to make oneself at home in the world of prose is thus not merely a question of home furnishings, of coziness in the narrow sense, but of a deep and orienting sense that things work out in the end, that the spirit is indeed a natural totality, and that no particular project should disrupt one’s equanimity.

Because the Germanic mind tends to seek its satisfaction in reflection rather than public action, it exhibits the recursion to self, that peculiarly intense form of inwardness (*Innerlichkeit*) that Hegel calls intimacy, or ardor (*Innigkeit*). The Reformation itself is due to “the old and thoroughly preserved *Innigkeit* of the German [*deutschen*] people” who, rather than spreading an empire across the world, have stayed home and fomented inner revolution (LPH 414, XII:494). *Innigkeit*, after all, just is the idea of an immediate connection, of the sort of felt sympathy with the object we saw the Italians and the Dutch achieve in their greatest paintings. Insofar as the Church stands in the way of man’s intimacy with God, it is German inwardness that demands the Reformation. The cultivated French, half-Romanic and half-Germanic, are so used to the condition of dualism⁹⁰ that they can embrace a hard-line materialism in their metaphysics and pursue a separation of

90 “The pure *Innigkeit* of the Germanic [*germanischen*] nation was the proper soil for the emancipation of the spirit; the Romanic nations on the other hand have preserved in the very depth of their soul, in their spiritual consciousness, the principle of *divisiveness* [*Entzweiung*]” (LPH 420–1, XII:501).

Church from State that seems schizophrenic to Hegel. “‘Eh bien,’ said Napoleon, ‘we shall go to mass again.’” This nonchalance is a signal to Hegel that “in their inmost being” the Romanic peoples “may be said to be alienated from themselves” (LPH 421, XII:501).

The Germanic disposition thus comprises a range of traits: a deeply felt interiority (*Innigkeit*); a cheerful participation in daily life (*Gemütlichkeit*); an aversion to great undertakings, such as the divisive political activity of French *Charakter*; and a sort of principled independent-mindedness (*Eigensinn*). At the root of these various phenomena is that trait Hegel calls *Gemüt*, the implicit sense for the whole, the unconscious faith in the fact of reconciliation that he elsewhere calls “depth of soul [*tiefer Seele*]” (1823, Ms. 181). What does a cheerful, Dutch sense of reconciliation have to do with the single-mindedness of a Luther? Hegel cites a helpful expression here: “The French call the Germans *entiers*, whole, that is *eigensinnig*” (LPH 421, XII:501). The idea, in other words, is that the Germanic faith in the wholeness of the *outer* world – the culture’s harmony with itself, God’s reconciliation with man – yields a corresponding faith in the wholeness of the *inner* world of conscience and conviction. Luther is *entier*, in other words, both in his call for a personal relationship to God and in the confidence with which he stakes his claim despite the certainty of excommunication. Indeed, *Eigensinn*, or having-a-mind-of-one’s-own, is the term by which, in the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel characterizes Luther, the Reformation, and the entire modern era.⁹¹

If Hegel’s attitude toward the German *Gemüt* is almost exclusively positive in the lectures on history, we can already anticipate the problems that will surface in the lectures on art. Like any form of self-certainty, German depth of soul is characteristically one-sided. We have seen one of its consequences already: the self-enclosure or *Verschlossenheit* that sets in when the deep soul realizes that words are not adequate to the intimacy of her feelings, that *Urtheil* corrupts the wholeness of Hölderlinian *Sein*.⁹² It is but a short step from here to the Goethean shepherds and *Junggesellen* who “speak only in falling

91 “It is a sheer *Eigensinn*, the *Eigensinn* which does honour to mankind, to refuse to recognize in conviction [*Gesinnung*] anything not ratified by thought. This *Eigensinn* is the characteristic of our epoch, besides being the principle peculiar to Protestantism. What Luther initiated as faith in feeling and in the witness of the spirit, is precisely what spirit, which has since become more mature, has striven to apprehend in the concept in order to free and so to find itself in the world as it exists today” (PR 12, VII:27).

92 Evidently, the concept of *Innigkeit* was, according to Heidegger, important to Hölderlin’s work as well.

silent" and thence to the whole complex of late romantic pathologies: ironists, beautiful souls, and the poetics of *Sehnsucht*. Hegel's language helps us trace this development. Werther, the first beautiful soul Hegel discusses, is defined by the *Eigensinn* of his love for Lotte (LFA 241, XIII:313), and apart from the more perverse of the Christian martyrs (LFA 547, XIV:165), Hegel reserves the term in the *Aesthetics* for the particularly "German *Eigensinn*" of Tieck's and Schlegel's avant-gardism.⁹³ At the same time, it is the Germans, as we will see in the next chapter, who have pushed the "true" humor of the English into the limit case of Jean Paul's subjectivism. "The Germans are much more forgiving of the humoristic," Hegel observes; "among the French it has had less success" (1828, Ms. 101).⁹⁴ Even naturalistic drama, the other chief development of post-romantic art, is a German form. Hegel notes that the *drame bourgeois* was first developed in France, in Diderot's *Le Fils naturel* and the theoretical apparatus that accompanied it, but was then taken up and fully pursued in Germany by Goethe in his *Sturm und Drang* period, by Schiller in *Kabale und Liebe*, and finally, in a decadent form, by Iffland and Kotzebue.⁹⁵ What is more, there is something "particularly German" about the naturalistic direction of modern drama (1823, Ms. 185; LFA 597, XIV:224).

An exaggerated inwardness has even turned up in painting. The work of the Düsseldorf school had met with great popular approval in 1828, not long before Hegel began his final lecture series. The

93 "Since Tieck's time [the dramatist's] contempt for the public has become the fashion, especially in Germany. The German author insists on expressing himself according to his own private personality and not making his works agreeable to hearers or spectators. On the contrary, German *Eigensinn* requires that everyone shall be something different from everyone else in order to display his originality. For example, Tieck and the brothers Schlegel with their premeditated irony . . . Our neighbours, the French, act altogether to the contrary: they write for immediate effect and keep their public constantly in view, and it for its part can be, and is, a keener and severer critic of the author because in France there is an established artistic taste, while in Germany anarchy reigns" (LFA 1175, xv:496–7). The French demand the freedom to do what they want, the Germans to think what they want.

94 Hegel may be thinking here of the fact that Diderot did not publish his two great comic/ironic works in France and that they became known there thanks only to Schiller's partial translation of *Jacques the Fatalist* (1785) and Goethe's complete translation of *Rameau's Nephew* (1805), both of which were popular in Germany.

95 In fact, the first bourgeois drama on the Continent and the first theoretical defense of the genre are German. Lessing's *Miss Sara Sampson* (1755) is subtitled a "*bürgerliches Trauerspiel*" and his *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* makes him the "father of modern European drama," argues F.J. Lampert in *German Classical Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 15, 31.

paradigmatic work here is Schadow's portrait of Mignon, the orphan amanuensis in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*. The problem with the work appears to be that subjects from poetry are not appropriate, for Lessingian reasons, in painting. (Since there is no possibility for narrative development, that is, there is no way to reveal the sort of complex psychological states we encounter in literature.⁹⁶) But older painters, Hegel notes, have borrowed successfully from Ariosto and the Bible, among others. The real problem with the Düsseldorf school is that in spite of their "great intelligence and technical skill," they have "adopted this tendency to pure inwardness" (LFA 856, xv:91). That is, they have chosen the wrong *sort* of poetic subject. Painting can display the inner life, but it requires "living and specific situations" in order to do so. The problem for Schadow is that there is no *situation* in which it is appropriate to present Mignon. She is defined not by what she *does*, but by what she *is* (a certain *sui generis* soul) and by what lies closest to her heart (the lemons blooming back in Italy). This is the sense in which objectivity is required, and this is an objectivity Persian poetry possesses in its attention to daily life.

Hegel's interest in European ethnicity, and with the contrast of the French and German temperaments in particular, can seem to us a sort of parlor game today. But in the case of post-romantic art, and Goethe's *Divan* above all, these genealogies are in my view quite important. It is certainly interesting, after all, that the entire range of dead-end options Hegel canvasses in the "Dissolution of the Romantic Form of Art" (LFA 593 ff., xiv:220 ff.) is generated by the German temperament. On one side, these involve the mere transcription of daily life in naturalistic painting and drama – presumably a consequence of that German *Gemütlichkeit* which finds itself at home in daily life. On the other side, that world is mocked, lamented, rejected – in other words, evaded – in the "subjectivism" of Schlegel, Novalis, and Jean Paul. What joins the pandering bourgeois dramatists to the Jena avant-garde to Goethean "naïveté" is at the most general level a failure to make the inner life objective. This failure is of course the essence of romantic art in general, but the dissolution of that project is, in particular, a working out of the consequences of two particularly German traits: the felt conviction that the real is the rational, and, on the other hand, a sense that this very conviction is too profound to be

96 Bungay takes the criticism in this way (*Beauty and Truth*, 125–6). Schadow's painting is reproduced here.

expressed, and thus is perhaps not real, *wirklich*, at all. The famous end of art is thus a local development: the naturalistic “*Richtung*” of bourgeois drama is “eine eigentümliche deutsche und der Schluss der Kunst überhaupt” (1823, Ms. 185). This will have clear consequences for Goethe’s solution.

There are consequences as well for our view of Romanticism. At times, Hegel presents the art of irony as a curious sideshow, a sort of hoax perpetrated by enterprising twenty-year-olds or else, in Novalis’s case, a sincere but disastrous application of Fichtean metaphysics to the practice of poetry. In [chapter 1](#), I even argued that Hegel characterizes Romanticism as a species of anti-art. But whatever its failures, irony is, from our present vantage, simply a radicalization of the same aspects of the German temperament, the stubborn insistence on the truth and depth of subjectivity, to which Hegel attributes the choked passions of Goethe’s early lyric verse. It turns out that there is a basic tension in Hegel’s conception of *Gemüt*. Where this feature of the Germanic disposition shades over into *Gemütlichkeit*, we have the steady pleasure in the everyday rendered with a saving *Lebendigkeit* in Dutch art and with a dead objectivity in bourgeois drama. Where the *Gemüt* tends toward the *demand* for unity, a demand to which it clings stubbornly even when it finds it impossible to express, we have that depth of soul that walls itself off from the world. We can put the point this way. Why have the French been slow to take an interest in the *drame bourgeois*? Because in the *Entzweiung* of their ethnic ancestry – half-Greek and half-Goth – they are content with dualism, with the sense that reality will never quite match up to the ideal. And why have irony and humor failed to take root in France as well? For the same reason: because the French never felt the claims of *Innigkeit* and the demand for wholeness strongly enough to lament its absence and thus to long with Solger for the return of a golden age.⁹⁷

Looking back to the account of post-romantic art sketched in [chapter 1](#), perhaps the central point to take away from a reading of

97 In his discussion of Fichte in the lectures on the history of philosophy, Hegel offers an interesting comment on the logic of *Sehnsucht*. For Fichte, “Longing is the divine,” Hegel says; “in longing I have not forgotten myself; this is why it is such a comfortable situation, I am this excellence” (Sehnen ist das Göttliche; im Sehnen habe ich mich nicht vergessen; darum ist es ein so behaglicher Zustand, Ich sei diese Vortrefflichkeit) (LHP III:498, xx:407). The last comment is sarcastic, perhaps, but the point is that *Sehnen* is a way to keep the primacy of the subject, of the *Ich*, always in view.

Hegel's philosophy of history and the theory of ethnicity upon which it depends is that the traditional picture of the threats to the artist and her public has remained incomplete. Certainly the loss of a religious basis for art damages the possibilities of beauty and opens up an interest in virtuosic effects that goes hand in hand with risks of showmanship and fraudulence that only the artist of great integrity, the *freie Geist*, can properly resist. But beside the challenges posed to the arts by the negative freedoms of the post-religious era, we can now see that the leading features of the Germanic temperament – stubbornness, intense inwardness, and a demand for unity in the realm of the everyday – are also responsible for the characteristic failings of modern poetry and drama.

Hegel follows Herder in presenting lyric, or *Lied*, as a form in which a nation can recognize and enjoy its own disposition. But the German disposition turns out to be rather difficult to enjoy, and these difficulties give rise to the range of artforms – humor, irony, longing, naturalism – that populate the artworld of turn-of-the-century Germany. Beginning in 1826 and continuing in 1828, however, Hegel begins to imagine a literature of reconciliation, of a virtuosic display that treats shareable, or “objective,” content. We have seen above the ways in which lyric reconciliation is achieved: in the clarification of feeling, and in the creation of the poetic persona.⁹⁸ But the national quality of the lyric song means that it can introduce new moods as well, can, in Goethe's *Divan*, loosen the grip of the Germanic cast of mind by making available new modes of thought. In the case of poetry, this will involve, in the first instance, the disruption of the shepherd's lament with the *Gewalt* of virtuosity. “What we may regard as necessary” for the poetry of reconciliation, Hegel offers, is not only emotional depth, the “sensitive abandonment of the heart in the object,” but also “a *subjective* spirited movement of imagination and the heart” (LFA 609, XIV:240). The question is thus how to indulge the powers of linguistic play without undermining the sense of emotional investment. Jean

98 “Th[e] inclination [of Germanic peoples] towards a lyrical treatment,” Hegel observes, “is essentially grounded in the fact that the entire life of these nations has been developed on the basis of the principle of the personality which is forced to produce out of its own resources as its own what is substantive and objective and to give a shape to that, and this process of plumbing its own depths it pursues more and more consciously” (LFA 1153, xv:469). By turning everything in his life into a poem, recall, Goethe achieves a self-sufficiency (*Selbständigkeit*) reserved for the heroes of classical epic; he becomes, in reflection if not in action, a genuinely self-made man.

Paul poses the same question in his own lectures on art: “By our definition, romantic poetry, as opposed to plastic [ancient] poetry, delights in presenting the infinity of the subject [its reflective depth] ... But how will the comic become romantic, since it consists merely in contrasting the finite with the finite, and cannot allow any infinity?”⁹⁹

99 *Horn*, 88 (*Vorschule*, §31).

MODERN LITERATURE

The bird would cease and be as other birds
But that he knows in singing not to sing.
The question that he frames in all but words
Is what to make of a diminished thing.

Frost, "The Oven Bird" (1916)

We began a defense of art's indispensability by seeing, in [chapter 1](#), that philosophical accounts of the satisfactions of modern life have an unsatisfying tendency toward abstraction and the self-alienating indenture of the lower faculties to the higher. The challenge to the post-romantic artist was to find ways to express the complexities of nineteenth-century life with the concrete immediacy necessary for aesthetic experience. The obstacles here derived from those very complexities – the overlapping jurisdictions of private right, moral duty, and civic role-playing elaborated in Hegel's social theory – and from the heavily discursive, intellectualist habits of mind characteristic of a prosaic culture. Later chapters have revealed that art's liberation of sense and imagination then turned out to involve the painter's self-investment in the act of creation; the poet's estrangement of the habits of prose; and the efforts of both to confront their audiences with an everydayness both invitingly familiar (the mirror in the roadway) and depressingly banal (yet another glass of schnapps). On the reading I have been developing, these are the elements – virtuosity, self-investment, an aggressively unnatural style, and an aggressively naturalist content – on which a Hegelian theory of the modern arts must stand. In the last section of the previous chapter, however, this account took a turn that at once enriches and undermines the power and relevance of Hegel's view.

The account of the Germanic temperament alluded to in the lectures on art and worked out in the lectures on the philosophy of history enriches Hegel's theory of modern art by discovering new ways in which we need it. In particular, the account of *Innigkeit* suggests that the obstacles to artistic expression lie not only outside the artist and his audience, in the enviroing bureaucracy of prose, but inside them as well, in the profound and inarticulable feeling (or demand) for the glad coherence of the whole. (This aspect of German life is of course familiar to us from Hegel's theory of the beautiful soul and his critiques of Solger and the Romantic generation. Still, it is only in the theory of the Germanic temperament that the threat of philosophical and artistic Romanticism is established as a permanent threat to the speculative standpoint rather than a mere moment, canceled and preserved, of spirit's self-development.) What is particularly exciting about Hegel's theory of national temperament is the implication it carries that a philosophy of modern art gains from, and perhaps requires, an investment in something like moral psychology. The notion familiar from [chapter 1](#) that modernity leads us into abstraction belongs to this psychology, but accounts for only part of it. The picture of the German psyche, by contrast, the outlines of which I have merely sketched above, adds a significant degree of complexity. One might even say that the psychology of German *Eigensinn* anticipates the basic mechanisms of Freudian theory – repression, displacement, projection, neurosis, and so on – that have survived the collapse of his theory of sexuality. Modern literature, in sum, can be said on Hegel's view to perform not one therapy but two: not only the project of “tak[ing] speculative thinking into the imagination and giv[ing] it a body” (LFA 977, xv:245), but of forcing the soul to yield up the purity of its depths, and speak.

But the discovery of the Germanic temperament also undermines the force of Hegel's account. The embodiment of reason is a project shared by all modern nations, but the counseling of beautiful souls may be a narrowly German concern. Is it? Yes, to a degree. Set aside the question of the accuracy of Hegel's account of the Germanic psyche; it is certainly tendentious and perhaps incoherent. (A deep inner sense of self leads variously to Dutch self-contentment, Luther's conscientious objection, and post-Fichteian longing, all of which somehow share a quality of stubborn self-will.) Set aside as well the obvious fact that the German lyric was not closed off to the readers of other nations, as the success of Madame de Staël's *De l'Allemagne* had shown

a few years before Hegel's lectures began.¹ The strong approach to the problem would be to argue that the modern world just is on Hegel's view the Germanic one, and that, in some important sense, "we are all Germans now" – at once cheerfully at home in our public lives and fiercely committed to the authority and self-sufficiency of our private ones. Stated generally enough, this idea may have some appeal; but Hegel's text does not bear it out. The point is not simply that he is a racist thinker, though of course he is, but that his social theory demands he be, for a nation must be a *Volk*, and the possibility of political legitimacy requires a variety of nations.²

The fact that literatures remain organized by national temperaments means that a theory of modern art as such can only go so far, that to make contact with the works themselves such a theory will require the mediation of something like the national moral psychology Hegel provides us. But what are we to make of the fact that he unreservedly places German work – poetry, drama, novels – at the center of his account of post-romantic literature? Are the German-speaking lands the only ones in which art remains indispensable? It is no accident, in his view, that Germany is in the vanguard of new developments in the arts; it has been in the vanguard of religious and philosophical modernity as well. But Hegel would certainly acknowledge that his emphasis on German work is to some extent an artifact of his own nationality. His is a philosophy of great art, of works that have held up – "still unravished brides" – and it is not yet certain which paintings and poems of the most recent centuries will turn out to be the great ones. Hegel, who treats the canons of classical and Christian art as more or less fixed, is no great revisionist. But there is nothing strange in his efforts to participate in the shaping of his own age by supporting embattled factions like the Dutch genre painters, eccentric works like Goethe's *Divan*, or singularities like T.G. von Hippel that a French or English critic could not be expected to know.

1 She marvels at recent developments in Germany, where "Lyric poetry does not relate anything, does not obey the succession of time or the limits of space; it flies across countries and ages; it gives permanence to that sublime moment in which the human being rises above the pains and pleasures of life." Cited in Ernst Behler, "Lyric Poetry in the Early Romantic Thought of the Schlegel Brothers" in A. Esterhammer, ed., *Romantic Poetry* (Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing, 2002), 116. According to Behler, she has Goethe in mind.

2 States require recognition by other states just as individuals require recognition by other individuals. See M.O. Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), Chapter 7.

Hegel is well aware that other national literatures will and must pursue their own distinctive projects. In fact, this demand is a consequence of the principle that applies, as we have seen, to modern literature as such. "The subject-matter of poetry is not the universal as it is abstracted in philosophy," he observes. "What it has to represent is reason individualized." (The argument is discussed in [chapter 1](#), and above.) And it is precisely because poetry must individualize reason, he continues, that

it cannot dispense with the specific national character from which it proceeds; its subject-matter and mode of portrayal are made what they are by the ideas and ways of looking at things which are those of that character. This is why poetry has such a wealth of particularization and originality. Eastern, Italian, Spanish, English, Roman, Greek, German poetry, all are different throughout in spirit, feeling, outlook, expression, etc. (LFA 977, xv:245–6)

Modern literature must individualize reason, must render it apprehensible in images and narratives that can be felt or seen or held in the mind, all at once. Part of the possibility of achieving this felt immediacy is the realization of that artwork in some national idiom – an idiom concerned, at least in the case of German art, not with a grammar, a vocabulary, or even a set of customs, but with a temperament, a particular cluster of heritable psychological traits. The way to read Hegel's account of modern German literature, then, is to treat it as *prima inter pares*: an instance of a culture's modestly successful efforts not only to express its psyche to itself (as in Romanticism and Naturalism) but to aerate that inwardness with the poetry of other climates.

For while German post-romantic literature must take up German problems, and thus may not offer the sort of universally accessible ideal Hegel finds in the painting of the Italian Renaissance, it is also true that this literature cannot, on its own terms, remain merely German. To see this point, recall that Hegel's conception of the German *Gemüt* turned out to harbor a basic tension. On the one hand, the national temperament demands the felt awareness of reconciliation as such, of the rationality of the actual. (And among its more practically minded burghers, the red-cheeked Dutch in particular, this demand is readily satisfied.) At the same time, the very depth of that demand comes to block the possibility of its articulation, making it difficult for reflective types like Solger and Novalis to be at home in their own skins. To succeed as *German* literature, Goethe's must be a poetry of wholeness and reconciliation; and yet to remain *merely* German is to risk

a self-regarding *Sehnsucht* or a reticent *Eigensinn*. The present chapter considers two solutions to this problem: the comic destruction of Germanness in Hippel's "true humor" and the ethnic amalgam of Goethe's *Divan*. These works, and the latter in particular, form the core of that literature of reconciliation that Hegel terms, rather inelegantly, "objective humor" (1828, Ms. 101a).

What is lost is the devolution of the modern project upon the various national temperaments and, at least in the German case, the therapies that moderate them, may seem to be the very generality that makes philosophical accounts possible. But Hegel does not sacrifice modern literature to cultural studies: his own account of the German project is suitably general and introduces a moral-psychological richness into the account that adds, I have suggested, to its interest and its analytical power. Finally, a philosophy of national literatures may seem to offend against the professed internationalism of the modernists, who lived abroad and read globally. But it seems equally true that the famous émigrés were concerned precisely with the status of their nations. Joyce went abroad, it seems, in order to understand Ireland. James's circle of international acquaintance was broad – Turgenyev, Flaubert, the Goncourts, *et al.* – but his work is obsessed with the idea of his two nationalities, and with promise and failures of the possibility of tempering English percipience, and cruelty, with American crudity, and innocence. Does the therapy of national temperament make for great art? Not as great, certainly, as the world-projecting epic or the political work of drama. But when we recall that it is precisely the dissatisfactions of the German temperament that have kept thinkers like Solger and Novalis from acceding to the standpoint of the Idea, it seems that a poet like Goethe is doing important work indeed. One might not gather this right away by opening at random his *Divan*. (By contrast, any paragraph of *Ulysses* or *To the Lighthouse* announces the breadth of its author's ambition.) I have cited the final four lines of Frost's sonnet "The Oven Bird" because I think it captures, with both archness and humility, the tone of voice that Hegel has in mind. The modern bird knows his song for a diminished thing; still, late into the summer and long after the golden age, he can practice his art because he knows not to match the grandeur of Milton and Homer, knows in singing – the chiming of the line is itself a broken song – not to sing.

The present chapter is organized by the varieties of late and post-romantic German literature: first, in "Humor and comedy," the "true" humor of the eighteenth-century comic novel, then the objective

humor of the *Divan* (“Objective humor and the *West-östliche Divan*”), followed by a reading of a pair of its poems (“Two poems”), and finally the *Bildungsmoman* and the bourgeois drama, forms Hegel largely ignores (“Novel and drama”).

Humor and comedy

Humor was an English term adopted by German speakers in the eighteenth century in reference to the tradition of the experimental comic novel deriving from Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*.³ Goethe and Schiller admired Diderot’s *Jacques le Fataliste*, which pays open homage to *Shandy*, but had little use for Sterne’s German epigones (A.W. Schlegel and Schelling agreed), and it is left to one of these, Jean Paul, to introduce the concept as a term of art.⁴

Humor, according to the latter, is the “inverted sublime.” If sublimity is the discovery of the infinite in the finite, in other words, humor is the discovery of the finite – contingency, instrumentality, the prose of life – in the infinite. Satire, too, is an inversion of sorts, but its attention to hypocrisy and to particular “faults” is more like the discovery of the finite in the finite. The humorist, by contrast, assails the whole. “[He] recognizes no individual foolishness, no fools,” Jean Paul writes, “but only folly and a mad world ... It is not civic folly but human folly, the universal, that touches [the humorist] within.”⁵ And, naturally, the

3 Lessing introduces the term, according to Grimm’s *Wörterbuch*. Kant never employs it, though he liked *Shandy* as much as Hippel, Hamann, Herder, and the rest of Königsberg. See John Zammito, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 146.

4 Schelling fails to mention this tradition entirely; A.W. Schlegel dismisses the “sickly sensibility ... irritability of the imagination, [and] capricious humor” of the humorist (Jean Paul). Humorous writing risks fraudulence, he notes, for “one reads him and thinks to have found in the composition deeper connections between the serious and the playful than the writer himself had thought of” (*Vorlesungen*, II, 21). F. Schlegel’s attitude is less dismissive and much more interesting: he does not consider Sterne, Diderot, and Jean Paul great artists; rather, they are the “natural poet[s]” of a “cultured” but “unimaginative,” or prosaic, age (“Letter on the Novel” in J.M. Bernstein, ed., *Classical and Romantic German Aesthetics* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003], 289; cf. F. Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. P. Firchow [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991], 85; AF 421).

5 *Horn*, 88; *Vorschule*, §32. As befits a practitioner, Jean Paul’s account is more stylistic than philosophical. Thus *humor* refers to a literature of bathos and carnival, the topsy-turvy worlds of Rabelais and Sterne. By *irony* he means the poker-faced style of Swift, which involves mock-dignified language and heavy use of litotes. The ironist observes of a stupid person, for instance, that “He is not a man of sparkling gifts” (*Vorschule*, §36).

“subjectivity” of the artist rises to prominence as a result.⁶ Hegel was familiar with the *Vorschule*⁷ and seems to have Jean Paul in mind when he argues that in humor “the derangement of everything substantial” occurs when “the particular artist steps out against all the objectivity of the material and validates his subjectivity over and above it” (1823, Ms. 184, 187).⁸ Three features are common to both accounts: the elevation of the artist; the negation of the object; and the breadth, the holism, of that negation. Jean Paul places the greatest emphasis on the third feature: it is humor’s Beckettian protest against the universal folly that distinguishes it from the other species of the ridiculous. Hegel, by contrast, emphasizes the first feature, the artist’s self-elevation (1826, Ms. 286), which leads him to scant the sense of melancholy that, according to Jean Paul’s aesthetic treatise, mixes with the absurdist humor of his novels. At the same time, it allows Hegel to distinguish the total negativity, and thus the mere virtuosity, of Jean Paul’s “subjective” humor from the more modest negativity of Laurence Sterne’s curiously soulful, “true” humor.

We have touched upon the idea of subjective humor in previous chapters, where it has appeared as one of those genres in which the question of art’s end is posed explicitly for the viewer: “Humoristic works are in fact no longer works of art,” Hegel says (1826b, Ms. 56). This is not for want of value: Hegel praises Jean Paul’s “depth of wit and beauty of feeling” (LFA 295, XIII:382). The problem is rather one of composition; the wit and the feeling are there, but they come to exist independently of one another. Humor is, in the first instance, a display of wit, and in Jean Paul’s hands, the text’s ramifying allusions and sophisticated parodies made it famously difficult work to read. (Goethe apparently spoke of the “brain cramps” his novels brought on.)⁹ Jean Paul may have been dismissed in Weimar, but his success of 1795, *Hesperus*, outshone Goethe’s own *Wilhelm Meister*, and, as sometimes happens with deliberately challenging stylists, he was considered by many a genius. Hegel, we have seen, cared a great deal about the

6 Horn, 88 ff.; *Vorschule*, §§32–4.

7 He cites the text, though not by name, in the 1820 lectures (1820, Ms. 91; Horn, 143; *Vorschule*, §54).

8 For Hegel’s own acquaintance with Jean Paul and his efforts to secure him an honorary doctorate from the University of Heidelberg, see Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 378.

9 *A New History of German Literature*, ed. David Wellbery (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 466. Moreover, Jean Paul was “fully aware of the alienating effect of his literary manner.”

quality of the modern artist's commitment to her projects: the hard work (*Fleiß*) of the Dutch masters, after all, had been the saving animation of their art. It is thus more than an aside when he remarks that Jean Paul's effects, which "commonly appea[r] as extremely impressive," are in fact "easier than is supposed" to bring about (LFA 295, XIII:381).¹⁰ The Dutch painters had matched the diligence of their subjects with their own dedication to the techniques of painting. Jean Paul, who writes down whatever comes into his head and leaves the reader to puzzle things out, seems to have violated this compact and thus to be perpetrating a kind of scam on his audience in the manner of the supreme provocateur, Friedrich Schlegel.

But the substance of Hegel's critique is in fact much simpler than this, though it is not unsubtle. Humor begins with wit, but "a series of witticisms soon grows tiresome" because there is nothing holding them together: "we can't absorb ourselves [*sich vertiefen*] in them" (1828, Ms. 101a). It is not that the subject matter must itself be deep or important – *Sichvertiefen*, we saw in [chapter 3](#), is what we do in contemplating a rich bit of figurative language, an image or a simile – but there must be something to hold our interest other than the performance itself. Realizing this, the humorist makes a hasty compensation, trading virtuosity for deep feeling. But unconnected to the episodes of wit, these seem contrived, and the work "veers off quite readily into the sentimental" (1826b, Ms. 56; cf. LFA 584, 602, XIV:209, 231). Given that contemporary experimentalists and comic novelists find themselves taxed with the same charge from time to time, the observation remains relevant.¹¹

The two works Hegel points to as instances of true humor are Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and a German novel by an obscure writer named T.G. von Hippel, *Careers in an Ascending Line*, that Hegel calls "one of the few German works of originality [*Originalwerke*], now sadly

10 Responding to Hal Foster's suggestion that artists of the 1970s and 80s pursued a critical enterprise rather than a disclosive one, Michael Fried writes: "But the question, my question, is how deep or compelling or significant – I would even ask how difficult – an achievement 'casting doubt' or 'revealing the conditional' or 'troubling conviction' or 'demystifying belief' finally is?" (Fried, "An Introduction to My Art Criticism" in *Art and Objecthood* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998], 44).

11 Kurt Vonnegut, George Saunders, Dave Eggers, Jonathan Safran Foer, and so on. The American writer Padgett Powell once observed in a fiction workshop that the story under discussion was "in wacky mode." "And what must a story do when it is in wacky mode?" he asked aloud. "Break their hearts."

almost forgotten" (1826b, Ms. 54). Hotho's edition offers only one general discussion of the idea.

True humour which wishes to hold aloof from [Jean Paul's] outgrowths therefore requires great depth and wealth of spirit in order to raise the purely subjective appearance into what is actually expressive, and to make what is substantial emerge out of contingency, out of mere notions [*Einfälle*]. The self-indulgence [*Sichnachgeben*] of the author in the course of his expressions must, as is the case with Sterne and Hippel, be an entirely naive, light, unostentatious jogging along which in its triviality affords precisely the supreme idea of depth; and since here there are just individual details which gush forth without any order, their inner connection must lie all the deeper and send forth the ray [*Lichtpunkt*] of the spirit in their disconnectedness as such. (LFA 602, XIV:231)

Does this account of humor offer anything more than a corrective to the excesses of Jean Paul, who "allows only himself to be seen" (1826b, Ms. 56)? Yes, particularly if we attend to the analogies to genre painting. I have pointed several times, as does Hegel, to the moments of contact between Dutch art and post-romantic literature, but it is fair to say that the resemblance is strongest here, that true humor is a sort of genre painting in words. Like painting, which "espies the most ephemeral movements" (LFA 836, xv:66), humor treats "ephemeral things [*etwas Vorübergehendes*]" (1828, Ms. 101), and it is the humorists, like the Dutch painters, whose work forces the question "whether such productions in general are still to be called works of art" (LFA 598, XIV:223). The answer to that question was affirmative, recall, where the artist managed to "make significant even what is without significance" – which is precisely what Sterne and Hippel have done in "mak[ing] what is substantial emerge out of contingency." What is substantial here is not a particular idea or point of view but rather the "ray of the spirit" that binds the speaker's *Einfälle* together and suggests in his unostentatious self-indulgence (this is not an art of virtuosity) the "supreme idea of depth."¹² The ray of spirit Hegel mentions suggests the artist's inner animation, the "subjective liveliness" mentioned in Hotho's text (LFA 598, xiv:224). The "idea of depth," however, remains somewhat obscure. In the collected verse of the lyric poet, recall, it was the persona, the autobiography of a particular temperament, that

12 The essence of the English is "whimsical originality" (LPH 421, XI:501), a fact that makes Sterne's novel something like the expression, in prose rather than song, of the national disposition.

emerged from the manifold. But a humorist like Sterne tells us very little about himself. What is valuable in his work is simply the sense that, floating above the particulars of the work, is a mind that thinks, and that just as there are things in Dutch life and work to care about and commit oneself to, so life is, in general, something interesting, something available for thought.¹³

Hippel, who adapts Sterne's formula for a German audience, is not someone we expect to see praised for his originality. But *Lebensläufe nach Aufsteigender Linie nebst Beylagen* is in fact "one of the few original German works of humor" (LFA 584, XIV:209), displaying a genuine "freshness and vitality [*Lebendigkeit*]" (1826b, Ms. 54).¹⁴ Not surprisingly, this is because it addresses the *Eigensinn* and *Innigkeit* of its rural characters, "such still, deep souls from the humbler, often dreadfully humbler, classes who don't know how to express themselves [*Luft machen*]" (1826b, Ms. 54), "repressed characters especially who cannot disburden themselves and, when it comes to action, act violently" (LFA 584, XIV:208). This is not Jean Paul's notion of humor as the inversion of the sublime, a fist shaken at the whirlwind or the tardy gods, nor is it that of satire, whose attack on "civic follies" leaves the humorist himself unscathed. What distinguishes true humor is the possibility that the humorist might direct the derangements of his wit at himself, for if Hippel's comic treatment of the lower classes suggests, as in Flaubert's treatment of Charles Bovary, something like satire, the *Eigensinn* of these bumpkins is nonetheless a temperament that Hippel himself shares. Hegel had read the *Lebensläufe* as a student. The work has never been well regarded in Germany, and he was aware that his fascination with the tragicomic sufferings of repressed German peasants might strike the sophistos of Jena and Berlin as somewhat primitive.¹⁵ Why did he continue to defend its

13 Tristram Shandy, for instance, meditates in Lockean fashion upon the way in which the constant conjunction in his mother's mind of two ideas (the monthly winding of the clock and the monthly assignation with her husband) leads her to exclaim, in the middle of Shandy's own conception, "Don't forget to wind the clock!" The consequent disruption of Mr. Shandy's animal spirits is in some way to blame for Tristram's nature.

14 For a citation from the work that uses a rural organist's account of God's omniscience to illustrate the finitude of human knowing, see the recently translated 1829 lectures on religion (LPG 124, XVII:477).

15 The subtitle of H.S. Harris's study, *Hegel's Development: Toward the Sunlight* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), is apparently Hegel's reworking of a phrase from Hippel. One wonders whether Hegel, who could be deeply donnish and austere, would have described himself as "repressed."

value to the end of his life, and even to offer in an account of the Königsberg scene in the days of Hippel, Hamann, Herder, and Kant a sort of eulogy to Hippel's bourgeois vigor?¹⁶ The idea of the absurd, the principle of Jean Paul's humor and of Beckett's, depends, as Jean Paul sees, on the reference to a sort of cosmic point of view; it is the inversion of the sublime taken in Hegel's sense rather than Kant's, and thus of an essentially theistic point of view. The true humorist, by contrast, inverts not the possibility of a god, but the more terrestrial possibility of self-sufficiency, of the sort of aristocratic freedom displayed in epic. Just as we know our actions can be described without reference to a will, and yet we must act as if we will them, so we know that much of what we care about is worthless – the opinions of people who have never seen us before and will never see us again – and yet we cannot help but care.

A humor concerned not with the elevation of the self as such, but with its elevation above its own stubbornness might revive the spirit of cheerful self-overcoming that is the hallmark of ancient comedy. As in comedy, Hegel observes, "in humor everything can be forgiven" (1826b, Ms. 25a), and Hippel, who forgives the Germans their self-repression, might be the post-romantic Aristophanes. Before turning to objective humor proper – a category that may be broad enough to include Hippel himself¹⁷ – it is worth pausing to offer a sketch of Hegel's view of comedy, a view that owes something to August Schlegel and something to Schelling while developing an important distinction of its own.

Schlegel, who sees comedy's significance in the "freedom from all restraint" enjoyed by the comic poet, had worked to resurrect comedy's

16 Hamann evidently wrote to Jacobi of his amazement at the bourgeois success of Hippel's life: "er ist Bürgermeister, Polizeidirektor, Oberkriminalrichter, nimmt an allen Gesellschaften teil, pflanzt Gärten, hat einen Baugeist, sammelt Kupfer, Gemälde, weiß Luxus und Ökonomie, wie Weisheit und Torheit, zu vereinigen." Hegel, commenting on the letter, is impressed as well: "Eine interessante Schilderung eines so genialen lebens- und geistesfrischen Mannes!" (XI:340).

17 In the second half of his Hamann review, he explicitly contrasts the "objective humor" of Hippel's novel with Hamann's subjectivism. "In Hamanns ... Freunde, *Hippel*, der wohl ohne Widerspruch der vorzüglichste deutsche Humorist genannt werden darf, erblüht der Humor zur geistreichen Form, zum Talent eines Auszeichnens von höchst individuellen Gestalten, von den feinsten und tiefsten Empfindungen und philosophisch gedachten Gedanken und originellen Charakteren, Situationen und Schicksalen. Von diesem *objektiven* Humor ist der Hamannsche eher das Gegenteil" (XI: 336) (In Hamann's ... friend, *Hippel*, who may well be called without contradiction the most excellent German humorist, Humor blossoms into witty form, into a talent for displaying the most individual designs, the finest and deepest feelings and philosophically imagined thoughts and original characters, situations, and fates. Hamann's is if anything the opposite of this *objective* humor).

reputation from the attacks of moralists like Rousseau.¹⁸ This freedom is political in part: Schlegel points to the vigorous parrhesia, or freedom of speech, of which Aristophanes avails himself and the “altogether political” content of the plays themselves. Comedy itself is “the democracy of poetry,” a welter of equal particulars – though Schlegel then mixes the metaphor, noting that the poet’s “inventive wit rules without check or restraint.”¹⁹ Political liberty is but one aspect of comedy’s greater creative freedom: the exuberant transgressiveness exemplified, formally, in the parabasis. Aristophanes’ triumph is thus the *Birds*, the play in which “the aim is the least apparent,” and which “transports us by one of the boldest and richest inventions into the kingdom of the fantastically wonderful.”²⁰ Schelling’s lectures on the subject reprise the emphasis on democratic freedom,²¹ but his principal interest is in the speculative structure of its plot. Drama stages the reconciliation of freedom and necessity. In tragedy, the objective ethical realm asserts its necessity as against the freedom of the subject. In comedy, it is the protagonist’s stubborn subjectivity which is fixed, or necessary, while the objective realm goes free.²² The comic hero’s attempt to make his own subjective predilections “absolute” necessarily proves disastrous. Schelling, the genuinely systematic aesthetician,²³ tends to treat this

18 “[M]odern critics have generally looked upon Aristophanes as no better than a writer of extravagant and libellous farces, and had no notion of eliciting the serious truths which he veiled beneath his merry disguises” (Schlegel, *Lectures*, Lecture 8). Schlegel may have in mind the “Letter to d’Alembert on the Theater” (Lecture 14), where Rousseau warns that comedy “ought not to be dreamed of for us” in Geneva. After all, “it was in the theater” – in *The Clouds* – that “the death of Socrates was prepared for” (Rousseau, *Letter to d’Alembert*, and *Writings for the Theater* [Hanover, NH: University of New England Press, 2004], 340).

19 We enjoy “the apparent aimlessness” and “freedom from all restraint” in the artist’s “exercise of the mental powers,” and his work is “the more perfect the more unreservedly [these powers go] to work” (Schlegel, *Lectures*, Lecture 11). The lecture on the Old Comedy is drawn almost verbatim from the less well-known Berlin lectures of 1801–3.

20 Ibid., Lecture 12. Erich Segal agrees: the play “dramatizes . . . the fullest expression of the comic dream. In a word, it is Aristophanes’s masterpiece” (*The Death of Comedy* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001], 85).

21 In particular, it is the use of *public* figures like Cleon and Socrates that makes Aristophanes “the single highest type of comedy” (*Philosophy of Art*, trans. D.W. Stott [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989], 265). The idea is that all art requires a shared, “mythological” basis. Where tragedy has the figures of the heroic age, comedy must draw upon the resources of the present.

22 Comedy features a “subjective absoluteness” (*Philosophy of Art*, 264), while “all the laws of reality are suspended” (Schlegel, *Lectures*, Lecture 11).

23 On the difference between the systematic approaches of Schelling and of Hegel’s students (Vischer, Weiss, *et al.*), as against Hegel’s own more circumspect “phenomenal” approach, see Gethmann-Siebert, “Phänomen versus System” in Gethmann-Siebert,

development as an illustration of speculative logic. He is drawn, as usual, to the available symmetries: thus comedy is really “the highest tragedy”; Aristophanes and Sophocles are in fact “the same poet.”²⁴

Hegel acknowledges the “absolute freedom of mind” Schlegel had placed at the heart of comic drama (1823, Ms. 287), but he follows Schelling in shifting emphasis away from the freedoms of the comic poet – probably because his account of Greek life does not leave him room to emphasize the subjectivity of the dramatist – and toward the freedoms of the comic hero.²⁵ These are the freedoms of self-destruction: for Schelling as well as for Hegel, the comic plot turns upon an inherently self-defeating project, a plan that is intrinsically “ridiculous.” (Thus the *Ecclesiazusae* set out to write a new constitution, overlooking the fact that they are – women.) The ridiculous, after all, is precisely what is self-destructive. Hegel follows contemporary practice in construing *das Lächerliche* along the lines of the incongruity theory offered by the British moral-sense theorists in reply to Hobbes’s superiority theory²⁶ and known in Germany by way of Kant.²⁷ Both the *Encyclopedia* “Anthropology” and the *Aesthetics* follow the Third Critique on this point,²⁸ noting that laughter “is produced by something turning at once into its opposite, hence by something directly self-destructive.”²⁹ Since we disagree on what counts as ridiculous – what “contradicts ... habits and day-to-day outlook” – laughter itself lacks an objective basis, and Hegel distinguishes the laughter proper

ed., *Phänomen versus System: Zum Verhältnis von philosophischer Systematik und Kunsturteil in Hegels Berliner Vorlesungen über Ästhetik oder Philosophie der Kunst* (Hegel-Studien, Beiheft 34) (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1992).

²⁴ *Philosophy of Art*, 264.

²⁵ Hegel treats the parabasis, for instance, as a soapbox for the dramatist, not a Tieckian transgression (LFA 1180–1, xv:504).

²⁶ The “sudden glory” of “LAUGHTER ... is caused ... by the apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves” (*Leviathan*, 1, 6). The view is present in Aristotle as well, who notes that “the laughable is a species of the base or ugly” (*Poetics*, 1449a).

²⁷ Kant’s famous definition of laughter is “an affect that arises if a tense expectation is transformed into nothing,” and is occasioned by “something absurd” (CJ §54, Ak. v:332). Predecessors include Hutcheson, whose *Thoughts on Laughter* is a reply to Hobbes.

²⁸ “Every contrast between something substantive and its appearance, between an end and the means may be laughable” (LFA 1199, xv:527). Cf. Course VI, “Über das Lächerliche,” in Jean Paul, *Horn*, 71 ff.; *Vorschule*, §§26–30).

²⁹ PM §401Z, x:114–15. In fact, Hegel’s gloss improves on Kant’s. Jean Paul had objected to Kant that “people often laugh when the expectation of *nothing* is resolved by *something*” (*Horn*, 71; *Vorschule*, §26; emphasis mine). Hegel’s formulation – something turning into its opposite – dodges the problem. Further, Kant’s view of the etiology

to art, the “comical,” from subjective laughter, or “silliness.” If laughter in general is the apprehension of failure, then, comic laughter is the apprehension of failures which fail to matter.³⁰ The protagonist in Aristophanes is never “ruined in fact when his purpose fails but can surmount this disaster with cheerfulness undisturbed” (LFA 1201, xv:529). This is because that purpose was not, as in tragedy, intrinsically substantial, but because it was a lark, a whim mistaken for a serious interest. The German temperament is certainly liable to such mistakes, and it bears noting that one of comedy’s ambitions is the destruction of *Eigensinn* (LFA 67, xiii:97).

What distinguishes Hegel’s account of comedy from those of his predecessors is the demand that the protagonist come to an awareness and thence to a relinquishing of his own ridiculous demands. The distinction is thus between laughing with the fool and merely laughing at him: “we must be very careful to distinguish whether the dramatis personae are comical themselves or only in the eyes of the audience,” Hegel observes.³¹ The distinction is historical. In the Old Comedy of Aristophanes, “an individual is only portrayed as ridiculous when it is obvious that he is not serious at all about the seriousness of his aim” (LFA 1220, xv:552), and his “folly and one-sidedness” thus appear “laughable to [himself] as well” (LFA 1233, xv:569).³² Later comedians, from Terence to Molière, corrupt this bluff good humor by introducing a tragic element into their comic plots: characters so

of laughter is Humean where Hegel’s is idealist. For Kant, laughter yields a salutary vibration of the guts, an “equilibrium of vital forces,” mirroring the mind’s “play of presentations” (CJ §54, Ak. v:332; cf. *Anthropology*, §79, Ak. vii:261–2). Hegel, by contrast, sees laughter as the “vulgar” (because involuntary) side of a continuum of physical responses to the awareness of incongruity. At the other end, the smile – a voluntary “gesture” expressing “subjectivity[’s] . . . serene enjoyment of itself” – is the sublation of the laugh (PM §401Z, x:114).

30 Aristotle’s three surviving sentences on comedy include the prescription that the “blunder or ugliness” in question “does not cause pain or disaster.” *Poetics*, 1449a.

31 Schiller, in his discussion of the comic genres, strikes many of the same notes we hear in Hegel: “freedom of mind,” “look[ing] into oneself with clarity and composure,” etc. The difference is that Schiller fails to distinguish comedy (Aristophanes), satire (Lucian), parody (Cervantes), and humor (Sterne), all of which he treats as instances of comedy in general, or what he calls “amusing satire” (“On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry” in *Essays*, ed. W. Hinderer and D.O. Dahlstrom [New York: Continuum, 1993], 207–10).

32 James Wood reprises the distinction as one between the “comedy of forgiveness” and “the comedy of correction,” though he places *The Clouds* and *The Wasps* among the latter (*The Irresponsible Self* [New York: FSG, 2004], 6).

marred by vice, and therefore so “deadly serious in their aims,” that they must remain unredeemed by laughter’s general amnesty (LFA 1234, xv:569).³³ The aggravation of this latter comedy is satire (LFA 1199–200, xv:527–8), an art that can be “exquisite and cultivated” (LFA 515, xiv:124)³⁴ but that flouts “the obligation of using its presentation to bring the absolutely rational into appearance” (LFA 1202, xv:530).

Art, Hegel tells us, “has its end [*Ende*] in comedy” (1823, Ms. 289). What can this mean? Why should the trivial subjects treated in Aristophanes constitute the conclusion of a course of development begun at Giza? Hegel does not make himself entirely clear, but my guess is that comedy concludes or completes art, whose project is the embodiment of reconciliation, by completing that reconciliation itself – that is, by allowing us to take up, play with, laugh at, and forgive those freaks of our subjectivity which refuse the guidance of reason. These are the habits, peeves, fantasies, and compulsions – litigiousness in *Wasps*, bellicosity in *Acharnians*, sex in everything – which are the therapist’s stock in trade. The end of art is “the final point of the expansion [*Ausdehnung*] of reconciliation” (1823, Ms. 289). If tragedy has consolidated the ethical whole, and if comedy forgives and frees us of perversities as idiosyncratic as these, we have nothing left to fear.³⁵ “If you have not read [Aristophanes],” Hegel comments, “you hardly realize just how good things can be [*wie dem Menschen sauwohl sein kann*]” (LFA 1221, xv:553).

It is characteristic of the pessimism of the 1823 lectures that art reaches its consummation in a genre comprising the dozen or so

33 “[T]here is nothing comical about the vices of mankind” (LFA 1200, xv:527). Hegel’s treatment of Molière as a satirist, in the line of Terence and Plautus, is a version of A.W. Schlegel’s complaint that “these pieces are too didactic, too expressly instructive; whereas in Comedy the spectator should only be instructed incidentally, and, as it were, without its appearing to have been intended” (*Lectures*, Lecture 21). Hegel’s point is not that this instruction should be better disguised, but that its very idea betrays an anti-modern skepticism about public life. Note also that the distinction between laughing at and laughing with was the point on which Hegel parted from Schlegel in the case of Dutch portrayals of the underclass. See chapter 2, note 96.

34 F. Schlegel had praised them as “the eternal wellsprings of urbanity” (*Philosophical Fragments*, 37; AF 146).

35 “[I]n its infinite assurance,” “subjectivity, or personality . . . retains the upper hand” (LFA 1199, xv:527). Cf. Staiger: “[I]n the laughter that the comic provides lies an enormous triumph, an irrefutable truth. Again man is made aware of the limits of his finiteness, but only in such a way that he cannot get around affirming this finiteness” (*Basic Concepts of Poetics* [State College: Penn State University Press, 1991], 174).

surviving plays of a single comedian, written over a period of no more than four decades, thousands of years ago. Dramatic comedy is a dead art, and though the generosity of Aristophanic laughter, of the “truly comical,” had been briefly revived in Shakespeare’s comedies (LFA 1235–6, xv:572), Hegel appears to see no other evidence of it in the romantic era. That is, until the discovery of true humor. The comic overcoming of *Eigensinn* – of “Germans who ... in their reserve easily appear headstrong, stubborn, gnarled, unapproachable, and perfectly unreliable and contradictory in their speech and actions” – is precisely what we get in Hippel’s humor (LFA 584, xiv:208). And because Hippel is himself German, and himself liable to gnarled, headstrong behavior, the reader’s laughter at his flummoxed peasants is, like all true comedy, a laughter of forgiveness.³⁶ A final point: the comic protagonist is drawn from the lower classes, and it is the playwright whose generous imagination sets him free (LFA 1220–1, xv:553); the humorist, by contrast, must free himself, which is why so many works of humor are written, like lyric poems, in the first person.³⁷

Objective humor and the *West-östliche Divan*

The phrase Hegel introduces in the final lecture series makes for pretty poor copy – “objective humor” manages to sound neither serious nor funny – and I have referred to it, the post-romantic literary movement whose paradigm is the *Divan* and whose ancestors include the lyric cycles of Hafiz and Petrarch, as the poetry of reconciliation in the hopes of repairing its image. The reconciliations in question are on the one hand that of the modern individual and the facts of her daily life, a realm that reaches out to encompass “everything in which man as such is capable of being at home” (LFA 607, xiv:238), and on the other hand the reconciliation of the two literary modes that have come to dominate German letters in the early nineteenth century: namely,

36 Pippin is no doubt right that this is an art “greatly diminished in ambition and importance.” But how important or ambitious can comedy be? Is *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* great art? Is *Duck Soup*?

37 For example, *Tristram Shandy*, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, and Jean Paul’s *Hesperus*, which is narrated by a man, named Jean Paul, who sits on an island waiting for a dog to swim to shore to deliver news of what is happening to the novel’s characters. In the meantime, the narrator leads the reader on endless digressions (Wellbery, ed., *A New History of German Literature*, 467).

the virtuosic displays of imagination we considered in [chapter 3](#) and the sincere absorption in the affairs of the heart and the coherence of the personality that were our subjects in [chapter 4](#). The questions to consider are, first, what any of this has to do with Persia; second, supposing that the poetry of medieval Sufism does indeed have something to contribute to modern European self-understanding, how serious is the project of objective humor itself, of the leavening of feeling with wit or the grounding of play in shared concerns? Not very, Hegel's readers have felt: objective humor is on most accounts either un-Hegelian, unserious, or both.

In the first place, Hegel's interest in the *West-östliche Divan* seems eccentric, and his claim that it represents "the highest that poetry can achieve" seems absurd (1826a, Ms. 376). A work of curious structure (a lyric cycle organized into an apparently haphazard series of "Books") and even stranger content – poems addressed to the fourteenth-century poet and libertine Hafiz; to Hatem and Suleika, the Persian lovers, as stand-ins for Goethe and his love-interest, Marianne von Willemer; to the Ottoman theocrat Ebusuud and the Mongol warlord Tamerlane – the *Divan* was little regarded in Hegel's day (many in Berlin regarded it as a distraction from the more pressing task of a completed *Faust*³⁸) and, despite quantities of scholarly articles, is not well known today. Some argue that Hegel misunderstands Goethe's project;³⁹ he certainly seems to misjudge the course literature will pursue in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We will take up Hegel's lack of interest in the novel below. In the meantime, it is worth reiterating that the post-romantic canon was not yet fixed and that Hegel was well aware of the eccentricity of the contemporary works he was choosing to defend. There is nothing historically

38 The significance of the *Divan* for Hegel's view of modern art is underscored by the fact that he was apparently quite in the minority (along with Heine, it appears) in praising the work as much as he did (S. Unseld, *Goethe and His Publishers* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996], 231). Others thought Goethe should be working on *Faust* rather than trying to revive Sufi devotional verse (Gethmann-Siefert, "Einleitung [1823]," cc).

39 Bungay argues that Hegel overlooks the pessimism and *Sehnsucht* of Goethe's post-*Divan* lyric work (*Beauty and Truth: A Study of Hegel's Aesthetics* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984], 186). Bubner is suspicious of Hegel's praise for Goethe since in his view the two thinkers "embody two fundamentally different conceptions of art": Goethe, for whom nature and intuition provide necessary checks to "entirely autonomous thought," is much more a Kantian (*The Innovations of Idealism* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003], 231, 240). But Bubner misconstrues the importance of the *Divan* for Hegel as the reconciliation of the classical and the romantic.

necessary, in his view, about Goethe's interest in Persia, of all places, though there are plenty of contingent reasons that make Hafiz an expedient interlocutor. It has also been objected that the orientalism of Goethe's and Rückert's verse constitutes a regression to a symbolic past that can hardly be taken as a vote for the vitality of modern art.⁴⁰ In the era of Humanus, however, this should hardly surprise us. One approach here is to argue that the value of modern literature is, for Hegel, chiefly to do with its mediation of past and foreign cultures in such a way as to provide a sort of education for spirit, a phenomenology not in concepts but in images.⁴¹ But it is not clear that this sort of cultural tourism amounts to an indispensable task for art: the *Divan* might "reconcile" Persia and Germany, after all, but is this a reconciliation we require? In fact, I will argue, the value of the *Divan* is not its mediation of the past as such, but of a particular culture whose temperament offers therapeutic possibilities for modern Germany.

A deeper concern is that Hegel's comments on objective humor – in particular the "pure delight in the topics" it affords, "an inexhaustible self-yielding of imagination, a harmless play, a freedom in toying alike with rhyme and ingenious metres" (LFA 611, XIV:242) – make it seem a curiously minor art. For Rüdiger Bubner, objective humor is "an irrelevant form which has lost all force or tension, an art without a future."⁴² Pippin agrees, though he does not think that the irrelevance of objective humor points up any structural problems in Hegel's philosophy of art: "I think we have to say that Hegel's failure to imagine a post-romantic form of art (an outer form for a post-romantic understanding of freedom) is just that, a failure of imagination, not a systematic or necessary exclusion."⁴³ Henrich is willing to call it "a clear-sighted accommodation ... to the development of art during his

40 Willi Oelmueller, *Die unbefriedigte Aufklärung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969).

41 This is Gethmann-Siebert's proposal; see below.

42 Bubner, "Hegel's Aesthetics: Yesterday and Today" in *Art and Logic in Hegel's Philosophy*, ed. Warren K. Steinkraus and Kenneth L. Schmitz (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1980); cited in Pillow, *Sublime Understanding: Aesthetic Reflection in Kant and Hegel* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 225–6. Pippin takes a similar view: "The only forms of art he allows as 'post-romantic' are greatly diminished in ambition and importance – a new form of modern comedy, 'objective humor,' with a sacralized *Humanus* at its center" ("The Absence of Aesthetics in Hegel's Aesthetics" in F.C. Beiser, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008], 415).

43 "Absence of Aesthetics," 415n44.

years in Berlin,”⁴⁴ and Pillow hails objective humor as a liberation from Hegel’s neo-classicism and a defection toward a sort of proto-postmodernism.⁴⁵ Gethmann-Siebert, meanwhile, denies that Hegel could have been interested in anything like “harmless play” and blames the apparent triviality of the account on Hotho’s editing.⁴⁶ My own sense is that the “harmlessness” of the play of virtuosity in the *Divan* is in contrast here to the destructiveness of irony and subjective humor; that Hegel is not a postmodernist; that Hotho is innocent; and that the poetry of reconciliation is serious business. If the present defense of art’s indispensability is to go through – an indispensability to which, we saw in [chapter 1](#), Hegel’s theory of absolute spirit ought to commit him – we will need to show, at least on Hegel’s own terms, that this is the case.

We can begin with the 1828 account, whose argument is familiar.

To present the matter as it is without animating [*Beseelen*] it is entirely external objectivity. In contrast to this stands the subjectivity of the productive act [*des Produzierens*]. We stand here at the extremes of romantic art. [But] the coincidence [*Zusammenfallen*] of the two sides is still to be noted. The meaning [here] can only be something partial. In the romantic era we have seen the subjective enter into the entirely objective. The romantic [*das Romanhaft*] has this breach in itself from the beginning. [But] the satisfaction in such partial objects can go further, grow deeper; that is, it can develop toward intimacy [*Innigkeit*] and humor can become entirely true, objective humor. There can be no [thorough] making-intimate [*Verinnigung*] of the *Gemüt* in its partial objects. This *Verinnigung* can thus only be partial, this *Verinnigung* in an object, this subjective losing-oneself [*Sichergehen*] in the object can only be partial. The absorption [*Vertiefen*] that shapes the object cheerfully and with spirited imagination, moves freely (though not capriciously [*willkürlich*]) within it. (1828, Ms. 101a–102)

Italian painting introduced us to the possibility of *Innigkeit* with the represented content; Dutch art made *Innigkeit* possible even with

44 Henrich, “The Contemporary Relevance of Hegel’s Aesthetics” in M. Inwood, ed., *Hegel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 201. His support for comparatively unpopular works – not only the *Divan* but obscurities like Hippel’s *Lebensläufe* – suggests otherwise.

45 See *Sublime Understanding*, 226.

46 Hotho has “distort[ed]” the “coherence” of Hegel’s views by confusing the serious business of objective humor with the playful escapism of subjective humor (“Einleitung [1823],” CCXIII). This reading is not easy to sustain. Given that the praise for wit and play in the *Aesthetics* turns up throughout the chapters on poetry, not to mention painting, however, Hotho’s distortions must have been systematic and intentional.

trivial material; post-romantic poetry involves a making-intimate, or *Verinnigung*, that is a close relative of painterly *Sich-einleben*;⁴⁷ and here again it is precisely the use of creative power, “spirited imagination,” that permits a degree of freedom in the poet’s otherwise claustrophobic absorption in the object. Of course it remains a partial absorption and a partial *Verinnigung*—there is no committing oneself wholly to the prose of life—but for a moment, at least, the intimacy seems complete. The poet gives himself over utterly to (*sich ergeht in*) his enjoyment of this world.⁴⁸ Is this serious art? The reference to self-abandonment, or self-indulgence, seems to register familiar concerns about negative artistic freedom. But Hegel is clear that the freedom is one of *Wille*, not *Willkür*, and the notion of poetic self-indulgence recalls the poetic *Kraft* of the poet whose “lingering” in the image is “often a *Sich-Ergehen* in the imagination’s ideas, a wallowing in images” (1826b, Ms. 42). At a first pass, then, we can say that if Dutch genre painting, Petrarch’s *Canzoniere*, and Shakespeare’s Sonnets are all to be taken as serious forms of art, then the poetry of reconciliation, which employs many of the same mechanisms, appears to be as well.

But the more particular value of Goethe’s *Divan* is as an antidote to German inwardness.⁴⁹ Goethe has been inspired by the Sufi verse of poets like Rumi and Hafiz. Unlike Pindar in his odes, the Persian poets are free to give vent to their particular longings and obsessions, and

47 In Hotho, the two are used interchangeably: “What is especially at stake [in post-romantic art] is that the heart, with its *Innigkeit*, and the spirit and a rich consciousness shall absorb itself entirely [*sich hineinlebe*] in the [prosaic] circumstances” (LFA 610, XIV:241). In the lyric poetry of the Orient, the heart “invests itself into the soul of things [*lebt es sich . . . in die Seele der Dinge hinein*]” (LFA 369, XIII:475). For *Verinnigung*, see LFA 609, XIV:240 and 1148, XV:462.

48 Hegel now pauses to contrast the *Verinnigung* of the poetry of reconciliation with “that of the Greek epigram.” This form offers “something, an object, about which a feeling or reflection or witticism is uttered.” But “These are poems to something and about something; and they are thus a subordinate literature. For it depends on whether the object actually existed and something has been uttered about it [as in epigram], or whether the mind has made itself intimate with the object” (1828, Ms. 102). The epigram’s “clever elucidation [*sinnreiche Erklärung*]” of its object depends upon this object, which it cannot independently present (1826a, Ms. 209). If it should corrode or vanish, we are left to feel the distance, the lack of reconciliation, between the poem and the thing—as in Shelley’s famous “Ozymandias,” a meditation on the ironies of an unfulfilled epigram. Finally, the wit can overcome this constraint by rendering the object “a superfluity” and developing something “entirely witty” (1826a, Ms. 210); but then we are back to Jean Paul.

49 Convinced of his own authenticity and with “no bridge to reconcile [his] heart with reality” (LFA 583, XIV:207), the beautiful soul enters a quarantine of experience. It is not only that other people are treacherous and bad, as Hamlet discovers, but

achieve thereby a romantic quality, an *Innigkeit*, that makes contact with the German heart. But while the latter's inwardness is "oppressed and troubled," Persian subjectivity is "blissful and joyous" (LFA 369, XIII:475, 528–9).⁵⁰ Why? The German *Gemüt's* capacity to desire and demand the whole turns out to be much greater than the German imagination's capacity to engineer its own satisfactions. In chapter 4, we saw Hegel praise Goethe as a profoundly national poet, a deep heart that pines away with its lonesome shepherds, bachelors, and so on. But in 1828, for the first time, Hegel is sharply critical of his early work. In "Willkommen und Abschied," for example, "The content is entirely prosaic. The freedom of the imagination is completely uninvolved. It is the simple feeling of love prosaically displayed" (1828, Ms. 102a; cf. LFA 610, XIV:242). For all the animus against Schlegel and Jean Paul, it is they who point the way forward for Goethe. What springs the German heart from its own lugubrious traps is the *Beseelung* of creative power itself, the leaps of imagination undertaken in the image and the simile. The poet of reconciliation absorbs herself in the materials of daily life, but her *Vertiefung* shapes the object with *geistiger Phantasie*. The Wordsworthian pieties of Goethe's youth give way to the concentrated explosions, the Dickinsonian wit, of the "masterpiece" he writes *als Mann und Greis* (1826b, Ms. 80a).⁵¹

The Persians teach Goethe to find his satisfactions in the making of the poem itself. "[T]he Eastern mind is on the whole more poetic than the Western," particularly in its "magnificence and richness in images and similes" (LFA 978, 1004, xv:246, 279). Hegel praises the lyric verse of Anacreon⁵², a Greek, even comparing it to that of Hafiz

that they are just so . . . *shallow*: "All love and friendship disappear through the trivial behavior of others" (1826a, Ms. 108). "Inability to endure pedantry and rudeness, trifling circumstances and blunders which a greater and stronger character overlooks and by which he is uninjured, is beyond all imagination, and it is just the most trifling matter which brings such a beautiful heart to the depths of despair" (LFA 242, XIII:314).

50 Goethe "turned his attention to the Orient and delivered in his *Divan* a string of pearls which, in intimacy and blissfulness [*Innigkeit und Glückseligkeit*], surpasses all else" (LPH 360, XI:433–4).

51 For more on the objective humor of Emily Dickinson, whose lyric verse tilts thrillingly between a sentimental cheerfulness and a Kierkegaardian despair, see below. On imagination: "To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee, / One clover, and a bee, / And revery. / The revery alone will do, / If bees are few" (*The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. R.W. Franklin [Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999], 632; Franklin 1779).

52 "Anakreontisch" was a contemporary German term describing light witty verse; von Hammer-Purgstall, for instance, defines the *ghazal* (Gasel) as "the Persian anacreontic ode."

(LFA 1121, xv:428), but a classical artist cannot, despite his skills, offer an example of virtuosity itself, for classical art does not display its skill *as* skill. Goethe's *Divan* does just this, its "elaborate and exotic role-playing" making for "an imaginative hejira into an exotic dimension of lyrical freedom where the poet's voice alone calls the tune."⁵³ It is precisely this lyrical freedom that Hegel has in mind when he praises the *Divan*:

[Objective humor] is not the simple objective presentation, the classical, nor is it the symbolic; it is the romantic return of the *Gemüt* into itself, not as subjective feeling but as free imagination. We find this form in part in the Orient, and there quite brilliantly, and in part in the West, particularly in Spain. There is no *Sehnsucht* here, no craving [*Verlangen*]. The free pure imagination is without this desire; it is [lost] in the object, and amuses itself with a hundred related notions [*Einfälle*]. Opulence in imagery and similes belong here, so that one has the feeling that the poet took an imaginative interest in the object, and yet did so in the freest manner ... There is everywhere a play of beautiful imagination that proceeds from contingency but [achieves] deep feeling without desire. This is the character of freedom. (1828, Ms. 102–3)

We are quite close here to the account of the lyric overcoming of desire we encountered in our work on Petrarch and Shakespeare in chapter 4.⁵⁴ The differences are tonal rather than conceptual. Thus in Petrarch the satisfaction of desire *as* a form of desire had something to do with the recognition that desiring, or longing, is itself something worth doing; on my reading, this took the form of an acknowledgment that love remains a possibility and a central project in any human life. In the Persian lyric, by contrast, the poet's rich investment in the topic at hand signals the fact that he "took an imaginative interest in the object," but the pain of his desire seems hardly to register and the satisfactions of words themselves come to substitute for the missing girl. "[T]he Easterner in his absorption is less self-seeking," Hegel says, "and he therefore neither sighs nor languishes; his aspiration remains a more objective joy in the topic ... and is therefore more contemplative [*theoretisch*]," less "practical," less driven (and frustrated) by

53 John R. Williams, "Goethe the Poet" in Lesley Sharpe, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Goethe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 53, 54.

54 Gethmann-Siefert takes the mention of feeling without desire as an "explicit" reference to Kant's notion of disinterestedness ("Einleitung [1823]," ccx). But this reading fails to distinguish the freedom *from* feeling emphasized in the Third Critique and the freedom *in* feeling discussed in chapter 4.

desire (LFA 412, XIII:528; cf. 1826a, Ms. 195). Petrarch's speaker works himself out of sorrows that we know to be real; Hafiz's speakers, like Aristophanes' comic heroes, seem to be sporting from the beginning.

We have yet to see why it is that the Persians are such wildly creative poets and why they address the full range of daily life in a manner largely unthinkable to the poets of classical Greece. The answers to these questions, and the ground of the curious rapport between Hafiz and Goethe, have to do with the metaphysics of Persian faith. The Persians are pantheists, and pantheism is, after all, a sort of rough draft of idealism. Like the speculative philosopher, the pantheist affirms the thoroughgoing reconciliation of all forms of opposition, with the difference that instead of claiming this reconciliation as his own achievement, he refers it to an external authority. It is God who sustains the reconciledness of being, the All or One, for he is himself that All and stands as "the creating power [*schöpferische Macht*] of all things" (LFA 363, XIII:468). Naturally, this view entails a contradiction: to say that God, and not man, is responsible for the thoroughgoing reconciliation is perforce to admit the opposition of God to man. The truth of pantheism, in which *everything* is God, is accordingly the "sublime" standpoint of the Hebrew scriptures, in which *nothing* is (LFA 363, 371, XIII:468, 478–9). But before this trouble is discovered, and before the poets of the Torah turn their eyes to heaven, the poets of Persian Sufism are left to feast their eyes on earth.

The first consequence here is that the lyric poet is tasked with great responsibility, for if the Persian God is known "as immanent in all its accidents", it is the poet who reveals him there, "who in everything describes and marvels at the One" (LFA 364, XIII:469). The idea that God is everywhere in the world generates the same encyclopedic interest in daily life enjoyed by the Protestant Dutch, for whom God is scarcely visible, for it is a kind of worship to resee the ordinary and the given in the language of spirit. Goethe's version of this holistic project is not that of seeing God in the details, but of seeing himself there. It is in this sense that "every occurrence in life became a poem" (LFA 1118, XV:425), for every coincidence and curiosity in his life formed a part, when recollected in tranquility, of a coherent work: himself.⁵⁵

55 Goethe, who took pleasure in styling himself as a kind of pagan, even declared himself a kind of pantheist, at least in science: "In my science I am a pantheist, in art a polytheist, in morals a monotheist" (*Maximen und Reflexionen* [1829], no. 807).

The second consequence of pantheism is its demand for and cultivation of creativity as such.⁵⁶ To read nature as a book written in God's hand is, in a sense, and on a grand scale, to find "related traits in the apparently most heterogeneous material" (LFA 407, XIII:522). And this, recall, is the definition of wit. Sufist pantheism thus presses its poets toward a satisfaction in the everyday achieved by way of poetic virtuosity. "Pantheism in general," Hegel observes in his comments on Hafiz, "is the self-sufficient spirit in itself that maintains this carefreeness in sorrow; just this is affirmatively present in the [poet's] images and objects" (1826b, Ms. 37a; cf. 1826a, Ms. 173).

And yet Persian lyric freedom is also a sort of artifact, one encouraged by the very vagueness of its theology: "what the lyrical heart lacks here in inner concrete freedom, we find replaced by [a] freedom of expression" which develops "until it reaches the most incredible boldness and most subtle wit of new and surprising combinations of ideas" (LFA 1149, xv:464). Goethe's decision to emulate this freedom is less immediately theological, for the problems of theology have devolved upon philosophers (in Hegel's view, at any rate). Instead, I have argued, it is designed to help him circumvent the twin obstacles of German inwardness and language in an age of prose and to celebrate, like Whitman, his own coherence, rather than his God's. Again, however, this reference to the self will always threaten the recrudescence of desire and longing. The poets of Islam, on the other hand, are "contemplative in the glorification [*Verherrlichung*] of their objects" (LFA 557, xiv:176), each of which belongs, regardless of the individual's desires, to Allah.

Hafiz's *Divan* is a collection of some five hundred ghazals. The form is rather strict, comprising between five and ten monorhymed couplets and featuring frequent repetition of words or phrases. The couplets are fragmentary in the strict, or Schlegelian, sense: they are meant to stand independently, as witty epigrams, as well as in relation to one another. Hegel admires Rumi, but he favors Hafiz. Why? First, he is the most playful. It is in Hafiz's poetry, "so changing in its content, situation, and expression that the whole thing almost approaches humor" (LFA 1121, xv:428). He is also, as a result, "the most independent in

⁵⁶ Eastern poetry boasts "magnificence and richness in images and similes" because "the sublimity of its outlook leads it to use the whole vast variety of brilliant and magnificent superlatives to adorn the One being who alone is there for the mind to praise" (LFA 1004, xv:279).

passions and desire . . . the freest in desire" (1826b, Ms. 80a). But Hafiz was also famous for his iconoclasm. As in the Song of Solomon, or Dante's lyric work, and as in the Sufi tradition more generally, the ghazal typically treats an ecstatic experience of love that remains categorically ambiguous between the sensuous and the mystical. Hafiz's ghazals were known in particular for their celebration of the former side of that equation, as they were for their mordant gibes at the more pious members of the Muslim community, Sufis included. There is no reason but prudishness, the German translator von Hammer-Purgstall notes in the introduction to his 1812 edition of Hafiz's *Divan*, to take the *houris* and the taverns as allegorical alone, though neither is the mystical dimension to be discounted.⁵⁷ Something similar might be said of Coleridge and opium, or the Beats.

Goethe was enchanted, as Hegel may have been, by the air of heresy that surrounded Hafiz during his life and after his death, and which the poet's encomia to "wine and love, the tavern and the glass" have openly invited (LFA 610, xiv:241). In a poem pointedly titled "Open Secret" ("Offenbar Geheimnis"), Goethe rebukes the learned for their "impure" grasp of the poet's mysticism, and closes with the apostrophe, "Du aber bist mystisch rein, / Weil sie dich nicht verstehen, / Der du, ohne fromm zu sein, selig bist! / Das wollen sie dir nicht zugestehn."⁵⁸ Hegel cites the simple piety (*Frömmigkeit*) of the Dutch as one source of the cozy peace their paintings offer (LFA 886, xv:125). But he was not himself a pious type, and he seems to have been drawn to Goethe's and Hafiz's celebrations of the blessed mischief of the artist.⁵⁹ He may even have shared Goethe's sense of the esoteric nature of this blessedness. As a young man, Hegel had enjoyed trading the secret password of Spinozism, itself an esoteric atheism, that he shared with his Tübingen friends.⁶⁰ The irony in Hafiz's case is that the freethinking is doubly esoteric: wine and women are known to the wise – the "word-learned [*Wortgelehrten*]," in

57 Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, "Einleitung" in Hafiz, *Der Divan* (Stuttgart and Tübingen: Cotta, 1812).

58 "But you are mystically pure, / Because they misunderstand you, / That you, impious, are yet blessed / This they will not grant you."

59 "[F]or after all, in every age artists have not as a rule been the most pious of men!" (LFA 604, xiv:233).

60 On the "hen kai pan" and the reaction to the pantheism controversy at the Tübingen *Stift*, see Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2000, 30–3.

Goethe's phrase – to stand for love of God. The esoteric truth, however – and the very meaning of the “open secret” – is that they stand for *actual* women and *actual* wine. Goethe clearly delighted in the cleverly anticlerical puzzles of Hafiz's *Divan*.⁶¹ How far Hegel appreciated their nuances is not clear from the lectures, but his many references to wit and play in this context suggest he did.⁶² Anticlerical and irreverent does not mean irreligious, however. As we will see in the next section, the two poems from Goethe's *Divan* that Hegel singles out for praise make unironic reference, whether tacitly or openly, to an all-powerful God immanent in the world he creates.

There is a reason that modern Germans will read Goethe rather than Hafiz, however, and this has to do with a certain flatness or crudity in the Persian view of human life. Despite his wit, Hafiz often “expresses things and situations not as they are in *him*, in his heart, but as they are in themselves, and he often confers on them on their own account an independent and animated life” (LFA 1148, xv:463). He is a “fatalist” who does not suffer desire because he does not appreciate “the independence and freedom of the individual” or “the depth of the romantic heart,” and it is this pre-Christian resignation of autonomy that underwrites the cheerfulness itself.⁶³ In the case of routine disappointments, this oriental stoicism is a healthy corrective to Nordic neurosis. But Hafiz cannot be our poet, for he has yet to endure the crisis of his own subjectivity. As a virtuoso, he has learned to ride out

61 Consider, for instance, the curious triad of poems from the *Book of Hafiz* comprising “Anklage” (Accusal), “Fetwa” (Fatwa, or Judgment), and “Der Deutsche Dankt.” The first two poems concern an actual disputation concerning a charge of immorality brought against Hafiz's *Divan* by fundamentalists in sixteenth-century Istanbul and rebutted by the Ottoman theologian and judge Ebusuud Efendi in his decision, or *fatwa*. Goethe simply lifts the poems, word for word at points, from von Hammer's account of the incident in the introduction to his 1812 translation of the *Divan*. But Goethe then appends his own comment on the *fatwa* in which he, the German, cheekily “thanks” Ebusuud for excusing Hafiz his occasional indiscretions, allowing that “gerade jene Kleinigkeiten / Außerhalb der Grenze des Gesetzes / Sind das Erbteil, wo [der Dichter] übermütig, / Selbst im Kummer lustig, sich beweget.”

62 The fact that Hegel keeps quiet on the question of Hafiz's supposed atheism (not to mention Goethe's) does not mean that Hegel did not contemplate it, or that it did not contribute to his liking for the poet. The dangers of freethinking in this period are of course well documented. Hegel does observe that the *Divan* is “expanded in joy, security, carefreeness also in the polemic against societal relations, against the masses” (1826a, Ms. 171). The “polemic” here may in fact be one directed against dogmatic belief.

63 “If the Oriental suffers and is unhappy, he accepts this as the unalterable verdict of fate and he therefore remains secure in himself, without oppression, sentimentality, or discontented dejection” (LFA 369, XIII:475).

the tides of his desire, largely by distracting himself.⁶⁴ But in this way he continues to regard his feelings as incursions from a poorly understood external world. If Hafiz does not repress his feelings, in the Victorian sense, still he cannot yet recognize them as his own. A complete modern psychology thus requires the mediation of Persian genius with the experiences of suffering, forgiveness, and redemption native to the Christian tradition.

In the case of the *Divan*, we will see, it is Goethe's own reflectiveness that provides for this mediation. Another way in which irrational and orphaned desires can be adopted by the self is of course the reflective "purification" of longing that takes place in Italian verse. If we have managed to understand how a tradition as exotic as the Sufi can lead Goethe out of the German forests of subjectivity, and if Hegel lends rhetorical emphasis in his lectures of 1826 and 1828 to this striking discovery, he has not forgotten the achievements of the Renaissance: as in Hafiz, "[t]here is feeling in Petrarch, but also the freedom of *Phantasie* that plays easily with the object" (1828, Ms. 102-103a). Petrarch's satisfaction of longing as longing is an embrace of life as well, but a rather more muted embrace than that of Hafiz. The Italian achievement is of "cheerfulness as *peace*," Hegel says in 1820, for peace entails a recollection of violence; Petrarch's "silent greatness has, in its cheerfulness, an element of sorrow" (1820, Ms. 198). Goethe stands at the confluence of these traditions, of the ghazal and the sonnet. His love for Italy was proverbial, of course, and at least one commentator has observed that Hatem's flirtations with Suleika in the *Divan* recall not only Goethe's actual dalliance with Marianne von Willemer but those of Petrarch and Dante and their youthful muses.⁶⁵ The older Goethe recognized a deep difference in temperament between his own ruddy paganism and the mournful, Catholic quality of Petrarch's verse.⁶⁶ Still, it is important not to obscure behind the curiosities of a single work, the *Divan*, the scope of objective humor, which comprehends not only

64 In less serious cases – prosaic troubles, not affairs of the heart – a flourish of wit is perhaps all that is required to free the mind and spirit. Thus, for instance, in Goethe's "parables" (e.g. "The Cat Made into a Pasty") and his "poems written in the manner of fables" there is often "a jocular tone through which he wrote his soul free from the annoyances of life" (LFA 392, XIII:503).

65 Williams, "Goethe the Poet," 53.

66 "The Epochs," a sonnet which neatly contrasts Petrarch's lugubrious Catholic faith ("an eternal Good Friday") with Goethe's own blithe paganism ("an eternal Mayday") combines a deep regard for the Italian poet with a sense of profoundly different dispositions. Here is the sestet that closes the sonnet: "Petarcas Liebe, die unendlich

Goethe's late, spry verse but Sterne's comic novels and Petrarch's elegant lamentations.

The one respect in which the Persian tradition is more relevant than the Italian is perhaps in the Shklovskian imperative to defamiliarize the language of prose in an aggressively metaphorical style, to "tell all the truth but tell it slant."⁶⁷ Goethe's early lyric work is verbally unadventurous, at least it is on Hegel's view, and Goethe himself acknowledged the inclemency of the age: "I am only surprised that in prosaic Germany a cloudlet of poesy is still floating over my head," he writes in a letter of the early 1790s.⁶⁸ The point is not simply that the rediscovered power of the oriental imagination, "wallowing in images" like old Sardanapalus in his harem, provides the cue to European poets seeking that "more deliberate energy" discussed in [chapter 3](#). It is also true that a certain kind of deliberateness overshoots the mark. The mannered style of the French, itself an assertion of the rights of poetry over prose, had left German readers cold, Hegel argues, and led the poets of the *Sturm und Drang* to follow Lessing's attack on the "false bombast of the French alexandrine metre" (LFA 1012, xv:289). The German faction errs, in turn, in the opposite direction, drafting their dramatic works in mere prose. (Literary art must be versified, and when Goethe later decides to recast those dramas in verse, Hegel celebrates a prodigal's return.) What is particularly valuable about the Persian tradition, then, is that it offers an example of a linguistic and imaginative freedom that is unpolemical and unagrieved. Greek poetry, which need not struggle against the regime of prose, is "necessarily simple, not at war, not polemical . . . It is not habit, but creation itself, *poiein*" (1826a, Ms. 379). The same could be said of Persian verse. Given the pantheist's open-ended mandate to find God in the world, the Persian lyric exhibits the "incredible boldness" of a deliberately "artificial mode of expression [*gemachter Ausdruck*]" (LFA 1149, xv:464). But this is, as it were, a natural artifice, not an artificial one. Goethe, the poet of both artifice and nature, the sentimental and the naïve, learns from this possibility.

hohe, / War leider unbelohnt und gar zu traurig, / Ein Herzensweh, ein ewiger
Karf Freitag. / Doch stets erscheine, fort und fort, die frohe / Süß, unter Palmenjubil,
wonneschaurig, / Der Herrin Ankunft mir, ein ewiger Maitag."

67 *Poems of Emily Dickinson*, 494 (Franklin 1263).

68 Letter to Knebel of July 9, 1790. Goethe, *Werke*, Hamburger Ausgabe, ed. E. Trunz (Munich, 1988), vol. II, 128. Cited in Boyle, *Goethe: The Poet and the Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), II, 87.

A different reading of the significance of the *Divan* for Hegel's theory of modern art has been presented by Gethmann-Siefert, for whom it offers "the possibility . . . of mediating (foreign) history and culture, of allowing it to become 'our own.'"⁶⁹ This is an appealing suggestion at first glance: Goethe, who coins the term "world literature,"⁷⁰ and Hegel, who speaks of modern literature as an art of Humanus, of the community of human interests across time, are clearly interested in the possibilities of cross-cultural appropriation. But to what end? Like Donougho, whose views we considered in [chapter 1](#), Gethmann-Siefert thinks that the history of art is on Hegel's view largely at an end. The post-romantic project thus remains essentially retrospective, its ambition the "establishment" of a "historical self-consciousness,"⁷¹ or what she elsewhere calls a "formal *Bildung*."⁷² This sounds rather more bookish than does Hegel's talk of the flights of imaginative freedom or the poet's reconciliation with desire, but Gethmann-Siefert's point is that the *Divan* "provides the historical background and the objectivity of a world" that "allows it to be poetically experienced as a contrast to our own historical world."⁷³ Still, the point of this contrast, like the *Bildung* itself, remains rather formal: Gethmann-Siefert observes that a poetry of historical self-reflection makes us more receptive to other worldviews.⁷⁴ On this view, of course, art seems no more indispensable an enterprise than long-form journalism, and Donougho, who follows Gethmann-Siefert's reading of the *Divan* but argues for the exhaustion of post-romantic art, seems to develop the consequences of

69 "Einleitung (1823)," CCXI.

70 "National literature is now a rather unmeaning term; the epoch of world literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach." The line is from a conversation with Eckermann, cited in David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 1. Goethe's view of *Weltliteratur* seems to have had more to do with Hegelian or proto-modernist worries about the enervation of the arts, however, than with Gethmann-Siefert's interest in Gadamerian cultural-historical exchange. "Left to itself," Goethe writes in a late essay, "every literature will exhaust its vitality, if it is not refreshed by the interest and contributions of a foreign one" (*Goethe's Literary Essays*, ed. J.E. Spingarn [New York: Felix Ungar, 1964], 92; the essay is "Bezüge nach Aussen" from *Über Kunst und Alterthum*).

71 "Einleitung (1826)," XLVII.

72 "Schöne Kunst und Prosa des Lebens. Hegels Rehabilitierung des ästhetischen Genusses" in C. Jamme, ed., *Kunst und Geschichte im Zeitalter Hegels* (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1996), 149.

73 "Einleitung (1826)," XLVII.

74 "Schöne Kunst und Prosa des Lebens," 140.

her view more consistently.⁷⁵ My own suggestion is that Hegel is interested in a sentimental education not a historical one.⁷⁶ What matters is not the fact of Persia's foreignness or the achievement of its overcoming, that is, but the way in which the singularities of its temperament and theology offer therapeutic spurs to the language and the mood of German verse, pointing it past the neurasthenic inwardness of Novalis, the polemical artifice of French and Spanish style, and the prosaicism of the bourgeois epic and the bourgeois drama.

Two poems

Hegel's account lays such emphasis on a particular work, and a poorly known one at that, that it seems worth our while to consider the "West-Eastern Anthology" in some of its particulars. Fortunately, Hegel

75 Donougho, "Art and History: Hegel on the End, the Beginning, and the Future of Art" in S. Houlgate, ed., *Hegel and the Arts* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 205.

76 Gethmann-Siefert tended to emphasize the historical value of Dutch genre painting as well, as we saw in chapter 2. Perhaps this is because she takes the central project of the arts to consist, in general, in the "founding [*Stiftung*] of the community's worldview" ("Einleitung [1823]," cxciv; cf. ccvii). Accordingly, she tends to overlook the significance of the individual standpoint we considered in chapter 4 and the values of virtuosity that accompany it. We also saw in chapter 2 that Gethmann-Siefert underplays the significance of painterly *Lebendigkeit*; in the case of the *Divan*, she rejects as un-Hegelian the significance of virtuosity. Hegel cannot have been genuinely interested in the artist's "freedom in toying with rhyme and ingenious metres" (LFA 611, xiv:242), she claims, and attributes the distortion to Hotho ("Einleitung [1823]," ccx). Of course objective humor is rather difficult to make sense of *as* humor without reference to the skill and freedom of the artist, but Gethmann-Siefert offers her own account of humor as a form of self-reflexiveness ("Einleitung [1826]," xxviii). Though suggestive, it is not well supported by the text. A final point: Gethmann-Siefert's interest in art's role in the founding of a culture leads her to read the *Divan*, rather curiously, as a form of epic. It is the task of the epic to capture the substance of a form of life, "to extract from the concrete world and its wealth of changing phenomena something which is necessary and self-grounded" (LFA 1040, xv:325), and since Goethe's *Divan* captures the substance of Persian life, she argues, it counts as the "lyrical realization of the epic" ("Einleitung [1823]," cci). Hegel himself never says this and treats Goethe's work, like Hafiz's, as paradigms of the lyric (LFA 1145, xv:459). Gethmann-Siefert's rejoinder that Hegel considers Goethe's other works as forms of epic, like the idyll *Hermann und Dorothea*, is beside the point ("Einleitung [1823]," cxc–cxci, cci). The *Divan* does indeed embody the substance of a nation, but this is precisely a lyric project, not an epic one. Epic presents a world in terms of its singular social structures and the great deeds that found them. Lyric, as we saw in chapter 4, presents that world from the private rather than the public standpoint. To a poet like Goethe, a nation is not a political entity but a disposition, a way of feeling.

singles out two poems for particular praise: "An Suleika," which he is already citing, remarkably, in his lectures on religion from 1821, and "Wiederfinden," a *Lied* in six rhymed, eight-line stanzas that best captures, in my view and in Hotho's, the nature of Goethe's achievement as Hegel understands it.⁷⁷ We have come to see that achievement as the rough junction of two projects: the Persian indulgence in imagination and wit that serves to loosen the heart from its amatory attachments in the ordinary world, and the Italian discovery of the incipiently rational nature of love within the contingencies of particular desire, and thus of a freedom in feeling. Working through the following poem, we will draw out aspects of both of these projects. Ideally, we will also manage to admire it on its own terms, for we should take seriously the objection advanced by Bungay that Hegel's interest in the *Divan* is governed by its content – the "untroubled cheerfulness" (LFA 1122) that is philosophically prescribed of modern life – rather than its (perhaps indifferent) realization.⁷⁸

"Wiederfinden"

Ist es möglich! Stern der Sterne,
Drück ich wieder dich ans Herz!
Ach, was ist die Nacht der Ferne,
Für ein Abgrund, für ein Schmerz!
Ja, du bist es, meiner Freuden
Süßer, lieber Widerpart!
Eingedenk vergangner Leiden
Schaudr' ich vor der Gegenwart.

Als die Welt im tiefsten Grunde
Lag an Gottes ewger Brust,
Ordnet' er die erste Stunde
Mit erhabner Schöpfungslust.
Und er sprach das Wort: "Es werde!"
Da erklang ein schmerzlich Ach!
Als das All mit Machtgebärde
In die Wirklichkeiten brach!

Auf tat sich das Licht; so trennte
Scheu sich Finsternis von ihm,
Und sogleich die Elemente
Scheidend auseinander fliehn.

⁷⁷ I have not been able to confirm Hotho's reference to the poem at LFA 610, XIV:242 in the lecture transcripts.

⁷⁸ Bungay, *Beauty and Truth*, 186.

Rasch in wilden, wüsten Träumen
 Jedes nach der Weite rang,
 Starr, in ungemessnen Räumen,
 Ohne Sehnsucht, ohne Klang.

Stumm war alles, still und öde,
 Einsam Gott zum ersten Mal!
 Da erschuf er Morgenröte,
 Die erbarmte sich der Qual;
 Sie entwickelte dem Trüben
 Ein erklingend Farbenspiel,
 Und nun konnte wieder lieben,
 Was erst auseinanderfiel.

Und mit eiligem Bestreben
 Sucht sich, was sich angehört;
 Und zu ungemessnem Leben
 Ist Gefühl und Blick gekehrt.
 Sei's Ergreifen, sei es Raffen,
 Wenn es nur sich faßt und hält!
 Allah braucht nicht mehr zu schaffen,
 Wir erschaffen seine Welt.

So mit morgenroten Flügeln
 Riß es mich an deinen Mund,
 Und die Nacht mit tausend Siegeln
 Kräftigt sternenhell den Bund.
 Beide sind wir auf der Erde
 Musterhaft in Freud und Qual,
 Und ein zweites Wort: Es werde!
 Trennt uns nicht zum zweiten Mal.⁷⁹

The poem takes as its subject an unexpected reunion with a former lover and the poet's subsequent efforts to reassure himself, by means

79 "Is it possible! most radiant of stars, do I press you again to my heart? Ah, the darkness of separation! what an abyss, what an anguish! Yes, it is you, dear sweet sharer of my joys; I remember past suffering, and the present fills me with dread. – When the world, in its uttermost depths, lay on the eternal breast of God, he ordained the first hour with sublime creative joy, and uttered the words: 'Let there be!' And a cry of anguish was heard, as the universe, with a mighty gesture, burst and divided into separate realities. – The light opened – thus the darkness recoiled from it, and immediately the elements parted and fled from each other. Swiftly, in wild, chaotic dreams, they all strove outwards to distant places, and became numb and rigid in measureless space, empty of longing and of music. – All was dumb, silent and desolate – and God, for the first time, was lonely. And now he created the dawn, who took pity on the pain of division; glowing through opacity, she brought a symphony of colours into being, and

of a complex and speculative retelling of the biblical cosmogony, of the rightness of his decision to fall back in love. "Wiederfinden" arrives late in the *Divan's* "Book of Suleika," and the lovers in question are presumably Suleika and her suitor, Hatem.⁸⁰ The conflict, reflective rather than dramatic, is established in the opening stanza when the joyful surprise of recognition gives way to painful recollection and a posture of reticence. The language here is simple and direct, and the breathless tone – four of the poem's nine exclamation marks are here – suggests the corked passions of the German heart and the crude emotionalism of the younger Goethe and the *Sturm und Drang*. More interesting is the term "Widerpart," which in mixing the notions of "partner" and "opponent" conveys a sense for what had led to the collapse of the relationship long ago.⁸¹ (Meanwhile, the homophony of its prefix, *wider*, with that of the poem's title is picked up again in the next line – "wieder andrücken" – and in the important "wieder lieben," the poem's theme, in line 31. The question is whether the lovers' "against" can become an "again.") The poem's emotional stakes now appear set: as in Petrarch's work, the poet must reconcile himself and his knowledge of the past to the immediate, though not unintelligent, demands of his heart. With little warning, however, the poet now strikes off on a wild cosmological riff quite at odds with the mellow tropes of the Italian sonneteers. If the boldness of these images is explained in part by the emotional exigencies of the situation, it is not explained entirely. Instead, it is as if

now those elements that first had fallen apart could fall together again in love. – And with swift aspiration destined partners seek each other out, and the heart and the eyes have turned towards life immeasurable. Let lovers seize or snatch one another, if they will but hold each other fast! Allah now need create no longer, for we are bringing his world into being. – It was thus, with wings of the dawn, that a power drew me to your mouth, and the star-radiant night confirms our bond with a million seals. In joy and pain we are both paragons on earth, and no second 'Let there be!' shall divide us again" (*Goethe: Selected Verse*, trans. David Luke [New York: Penguin, 1964], 251–3).

80 These are the Persian names Goethe selects for himself and Marianne von Willemer, a thirty-year-old banker's wife with whom he had formed an intense connection during the period of his work on the *Divan*. The choice of these names is explained in the opening poem of the "Book of Suleika," but their obscure sources in Islamic literature are not significant for our purposes. Goethe included in the *Divan* three poems written by von Willemer, one of which, "Ach, um deine feuchten Schwingen," directly precedes "Wiederfinden" (G.H. Lewes, *Life of Goethe* [London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1875], 568–70).

81 Though "Widerpart" typically means "opponent," Grimm's *Wörterbuch* notes that it occasionally betrays "a heavier emphasis on partnership and a weakening of the concept of enmity." One of the texts used to illustrate the point is in fact the passage under discussion. Perhaps Homer and Dante were not the only poets to give a people its language.

the speaker has grown suddenly dissatisfied with the heartfelt but sentimental laments of the first stanza. Taking up the shopworn figures with which he had begun – the lover as a “star,” the past as an “abyss” – he now reconceives the scene as if the lover *were* in fact a star and the past a literal abyss; in which case the birth of their love is figured, naturally, as the creation of light in the void.

The biblical myth provides a narrative structure for the poem, which progresses through a neat dialectic in stanzas two through four. Though he quotes from Genesis, the speaker is not seeking scriptural warrant for his dramatization of the cosmogony (with its wonderful “schmerzlich Ach!”) and the question raises itself whether and in what way he is seeking religious guidance at all in working through the reunion with his lover. The skeletal narrative of creation, repulsion, and reconciliation is fleshed out in stanzas three and four in a series of opposing figures (night/day, fleeing/seeking, silence/sound, numbness/desire) that mirror the mutual exclusiveness of light and dark. This is as much a Newtonian universe as a biblical one, it is worth noting, a void scattered with *Elemente* each on its own arbitrary path. Goethe disliked Newton as much as Hegel did, and it is no surprise that this endless void strewn with particles proves to be a bad infinity rather than a true one. Governed by opposition alone, by the second sense of “Widerpart,” the world exists in a state of self-diremption: unable to interact with itself, it is unable to know itself, and consciousness, such as it is, exists only in “wild desert dreams.” Creation had begun in sheer poietic pleasure, in the *Schöpfungslust* that the poet shares with God. But dynamic phenomena, desire and sound, cannot survive in Newton’s box, and the joy of God’s great shout – “Es werde!” – has ceased to resonate: “Ohne Sehnsucht, ohne Klang.”

In the abstraction of spaces and forces, the universe remains benighted despite its stars. Even God, the source of all life, finds himself strangely alone. (If the suggestion is vaguely heretical, it prepares us for the coming dethronement.) God now brings night and day into existence in creating their intermediate, dawn.⁸² Dawn is not a time but a kind of light – literally, the red glow of morning (*Morgenrote*). To appreciate the significance of this move, it helps to borrow from the *Farbenlehre* the idea that color is born not from white light alone, as

82 In this way, Goethe has actually dramatized the interval between verses four and five of Genesis Chapter 1; that is, between “God separated the light from the darkness” and “God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.”

Newton had argued, but from a mixture of light and darkness. The creation of the dawn is thus God's attempt to heal the disjunction of light from dark, and by extension of the Newtonian universe itself, and to bring the two forces into productive opposition. Once this opposition has become dynamic rather than abstract, the canceled possibilities of desire and of sound suddenly return. The "play of color" allows all forms of opposition to resolve into forms of harmony: "Klang" into "erklingen" and "Sehnsucht" (or its absence) into "lieben."⁸³ The primary qualities of Newton's world have been enriched by the secondary, mind-dependent phenomena of color and sound.

With the cosmos in order and the fracas of creation reconciled, the speaker begins the process of stocktaking in the penultimate stanza, and the reader is encouraged to scan the story again herself. The origins of love, like those of the cosmos, are inexplicable and joyful. Yet the fallout from this first, blind creation is an episode of agony ("Qual") and disunion. Only once the inevitable fact of difference is recognized and taken up is harmony truly possible. With harmony comes the emergence of life, and with life the possibility of a richly human infinity ("ungemessnem Leben"). What we are now asked to realize is that life and love are *achievements*. They exist *not* because God has created them, but because we ourselves grab hold and won't let go ("ergreifen ... raffen"). Having taken matters literally into our own hands, we no longer require notions of divine intervention or mediation. (Here we recall the anticlerical spirit of Hafiz.) And yet, crucially, the claims of freedom do not entail a repudiation of the natural or God-given. Though the poet now claims Allah's creative powers, and pleasures, as his own, it is somehow still *his* world ("seine Welt") that *we* create. The poet takes responsibility for his feelings of love, and yet the origins of that love remain mysterious – and, perhaps in just that sense, divine. What is repudiated here is not the notion of the divine itself, of the mystery that gives meaning to life, but rather of the need for that divinity to intervene, either personally or clerically, in a world that already contains its own creators: lovers, and poets.

The "we" who create Allah's world appears at first to be humanity in general, but this is because we have forgotten the lovers themselves, who now return to claim their reunion in the final stanza. The world is not indifferent to love, the speaker has seen, for it is not a

83 For Hegel, love is the overcoming of longing; for Goethe, at least in this poem, it is the overcoming of its lack.

Newtonian world; and yet the world is not responsible, nor is God, for love's maintenance, which is left to our own hard work and the faith in our ability to hang together. The bold departure of the second stanza seemed at first a repudiation of the sentimentality of the first. But that opposition, like every other in the poem, must be resolved, and we see in conclusion that the bold force, the *Machtgebärde* of the speaker's imagination, was not an escape from the difficulties of the reunion, not merely a *Sich-Ergehen* or a "wallowing in images," but a course of reflection that has taught him, by way of grand four-stanza simile, to imagine the pressure of his immediate passions from the standpoint of the demiurge. And as we saw in [chapter 3](#), the effect of such a simile is on the one hand to loosen that pressure for the speaker, who is in crisis, and on the other hand to deepen and intensify, for the reader and perhaps the speaker himself, the sense in which this particular reunion of particular lovers bears a greater significance. The Persian freedom of the imagination makes possible here an Italian discovery of being at home in the life of feeling, which is in turn "raised up and, so to speak, blessed" (1826b, Ms. 41a) by our attentions. Whether the poem is Hegel's choice or Hotho's, it is hard to imagine a more robustly Hegelian stanza.

The poem's closing lines recollect its range of imagery into an affirmative though not narrowly cheerful conclusion. The morning light, not rosy-fingered but rosy-winged, recalls the realms of epic and the gods of ancient Greece. The lovers remain together from dawn to nightfall, and when their reunion is consummated – "riss es mich an deinen Mund" – the old passion is not absent. Light and dark, the primordial antitheses, are themselves reconciled in the brightness of the sky, "sternenhell." And here we are neatly returned to the opening stanza. The speaker of the poem had failed, at that point, to find reconciliation in the reunion, for though the beloved was the "star of stars," still the "night" in which she shone was made to stand for loss and pain. The speculative retelling of the myth of Genesis, however, has allowed the speaker to meditate on the births of music and of color, the mediums of romantic art, from the reconciled dualisms of the Newtonian universe. His grasp of dialectics thus refreshed, he can now see the interplay of light and dark (star and night) as a figure for the couple's newly strengthened "Bund." And having appreciated the fact of their interdependence, the speaker and his beloved are Petrarchan exemplars of human feeling – "musterhaft in Freud und Qual." The happy conclusion is certainly tempered here by an Italian

recollection of suffering. And yet the final lines reveal a flash of wit, as the speaker cheekily suggests that not even God, with his divine *fiat*, can break them up again.⁸⁴ Here we feel the force of the poem's larger claim: that the freedom we struggle to realize in our romantic partnerships is a species of that greater freedom – human freedom, in general – that we moderns claim for ourselves. Allah may have brought us into being, but we create his world.⁸⁵

Hegel contrasts the achievements of “Wiederfinden” to the failures of “Wilkommen und Abschied,” an early lyric in which, as we saw above, “the content is entirely prosaic” and “the freedom of the imagination . . . completely uninvolved” (1828, Ms. 102a; cf. LFA 610, xv:242). Simple in its organization and conception, “Wilkommen und Abschied” is built around the emotional upheavals of a midnight rendezvous. Night is terrifying, yet greeted by the lover as a blessing (“Die nacht schuf tausend ungeheuer, / Doch frisch und fröhlich war mein Mut”). The sun rises, yet brings pain in tow (“Verengt der Abschied mir das Herz”). The language is sweet, and unsurprising, and though the speaker appears “cheerful” by the poem’s conclusion – “Und doch welch Glück, geliebt zu werden! / Und lieben, Götter, welche Glück!” – little has been accomplished. “Totally different,” Hegel observes, “is the poem called ‘Wiederfinden’ in the *Divan*. Here love is transferred wholly into the imagination, its movement, happiness and bliss” (LFA 610, xv:242).

What is the nature here of this transference or remaking? In the first place, we have encountered this idea before. In their virtuosic play with images and comparisons, we saw in [chapter 3](#), Goethe and Hafiz took up the ordinary object, “made [it] into a thing of the imagination” and realized, in their “absorption in the subjective object,” an eastern sort of “joy” (1826b, Ms. 42). In the present case, as noted above, the poem opens conventionally – indeed, the opening rhyme of “Herz” and “Schmerz” suggests we are not far from “Wilkommen und

84 This issue of separation and identity – is a couple one thing, or two? – is the topic of the poem “Gingo Biloba,” found earlier in the “Book of Suleika.”

85 Goethe thus seems to produce in this poem that which he enjoys in Muslim literature more generally: symbolic richness, literary refinement, and metaphysical reach. In a letter to Zelter of May 11, 1820 (several years after having written the *Divan*), Goethe writes, “Diese Mohammedanische Religion, Mythologie, Sitte geben Raum einer Poesie wie sie meinen Jahren ziemt. Unbedingtes Ergeben in den unergründlichen Willen Gottes, heiterer Überblick des beweglichen, immer kreis- und spiralartig wiederkehrenden Erde-Treibens, Liebe, Neigung zwischen zwei Welten schwebend, alles Reale geläutert, sich symbolisch auflösend. Was will der Großpapa weiter?” (Goethe, *West-östlicher Divan*, ed. Michael Knaupp [Stuttgart: Reclam, 1999], 623).

Abschied.” Then something quite unusual happens: Goethe decides to compare the reunion of the two lovers to the synthesis of the primordial cosmic elements. The organization of the poem around such a conceit recalls Donne and the metaphysical poets. This sort of wit is not geared to make us laugh, of course. What is “humorous” about “Wiederfinden” is its highly imaginative, thus virtuosic, solution to what is otherwise a quite ordinary problem. Such demonstrations, I have argued, carry at least two distinct benefits for the modern audience. In the first place, the abrupt employment of imagination and the poem’s surprising pivots (from *Gott* to *Allah*, for instance⁸⁶) communicate the efforts of a poetic will to free itself from the reigning conventions of bureaucratic prose. In the second place, Goethe’s virtuosity distances us somewhat from the immediacies of feeling, thus allowing the experience of desire to be freed of its contingent elements, and its worn-out metaphors, and creatively reappropriated – “zur Sache der Phantasie gemacht” – by the poet. This is the sense in which love is “transferred entirely to the imagination”: yanked from the moonlit glens of Goethe’s early verse and led into the nothing-if-not-lively (and perhaps overwrought?) parable of cosmogony. Petrarch’s Laura was carried off by the imagination as well, if not quite so vigorously, whereupon she enjoyed her Ovidian metamorphosis into the laurels of the poet’s brow; and in fairness we could hardly say we have much sense of the beloved in “Wiederfinden.” It is even possible – just how free is this free imagination? – that the erotic reunion rendered visible in the theological scene is in turn the image of some further, perhaps philosophical reunion. This is the suggestion, at any rate, of Hegel’s use of the second poem he mentions from the *Divan*, “An Suleika (Dir mit Wohlgeruch zu kosen).”

“An Suleika”

Dir mit Wohlgeruch zu kosen,
Deine Freuden zu erhöhen,
Knospend müssen tausend Rosen
Erst in Gluten untergehn.

Um ein Fläschchen zu besitzen,
Das den Ruch auf ewig hält,
Schlank wie deine Fingerspitzen,
Da bedarf es einer Welt.

86 Meanwhile, the ecumenism of the shared title playfully reprises the project of Saint Humanus.

Einer Welt von [Liebenstrieben],⁸⁷
 Die in ihrer Fülle Drang
 Ahndeten schon Bulbuls Lieben,
 Seelerregenden Gesang.
 Sollte jene Qual uns quälen,
 Da sie unsre Lust vermehrt?
 Hat nicht Myriaden Seelen
 Timurs Herrschaft aufgezehrt?⁸⁸

This poem, from the “Book of Timur,” or Tamerlane, takes as its theme the sacrifice of the particular to the achievement of the universal, and we can see the poem’s four stanzas as structured by the iteration of five such relationships: first, the sacrifice of a thousand flowers to the pleasures of a pair of lovers; second, the sacrifice of an entire world (of flowers?) to the preservation of those pleasures (or, metonymically, their perfumes) across time; third, and more obscurely, the sacrifice of the song of the nightingale⁸⁹ to love or life itself, the entire world of vital or erotic drives; fourth, the sacrifice of pain to some greater pleasure; and fifth, the sacrifice of a potentate’s subjects to the glory of his empire. The orientalism of the *Divan* comes across more strongly than in “Wiederfinden,” but the real difference is that the love relationship is here only one of several possible targets of reflection: desire gives shape to the first three stanzas, but the poem ends much more broadly with the question of pleasure’s relationship to pain as such. In Hegel’s own manuscript for the lectures on religion, the poem is introduced as a companion to no less a verse than the famous final stanza of Schiller’s “Die Freundschaft” – another image of the sacrifice of the particular (the bubbles) to the universal (the foam).⁹⁰

87 When Hegel cites the poem in his lectures on religion, he says “Liebenstrieben” rather than Goethe’s “Lebenstrieben” (LPR 111–13, xvii:274; see note 92, below).

88 “To caress you with a fragrance, to heighten your delights, must a thousand roses, budding, first sink down to ash. – To possess a little phial that forever keeps the scent, slender as your fingertips, necessitates a world. – A world of life-drives which in the fullness of their urge have punished the nightingale’s loves, its soul-stirring song. – Ought that pain to pain us since it makes our pleasure more? Has not Tamerlane’s dominion consumed a thousand souls?” (My translation.)

89 Goethe uses Hafiz’s word, *bulbul*.

90 Hegel’s citation of the poem is here not entirely accurate, as it is in the *Heidelberger Niederschrift*, nor as vigorously rephrased as in the conclusion to the *Phenomenology*. He cites six lines rather than two: “Freundlos war der große Weltenmeister, / Fühlte Mangel – darum schuf er Geister, / Selge Spiegel seiner Seligkeit! – / Fand das höchste Wesen schon kein gleiches, / Aus dem Kelch des ganzen Seelenreiches Schäumt ihm – die Unendlichkeit” (LPR 111, an abbreviated citation of the same appears at xvii:273).

The theological point under discussion here is that of the relationship of divine to human spirit: “God’s objectivity,” Hegel argues, is “realized in the *whole* of humanity immediately.”⁹¹ Accordingly, the essence of Suleika’s thousand flowers or Tamerlane’s thousand souls stands on this reading not for the refinements of passion but for God, or *Geist*, itself, the savor of humanity, the distillate of its world-historical pain. But this reading is not mandatory. In the 1828 lectures on art, Hegel cites the poem as evidence of that “play of beautiful imagination that proceeds from contingency but [achieves] deep feeling without desire” and thus constitutes “the character of freedom” (1828, Ms. 102–3). Is the desire erotic, spiritual, world-historical? The center of the poem is simply the rhetorical question, “Ought that pain to pain us since it makes our pleasure more?”⁹² And the pain in question is not only that of love, or empire, but of dissatisfaction as such.

Hegel has a taste for the poetry of immolation. In addition to the foaming cups, charred roses, and slaughtered Mongols mentioned above, he points to a ghazal from Hafiz’s *Divan* that features the suicide of a candle. “In Hafiz there is sorrow enough, but he remains always the same carefree man. He uses the image: ‘In gratitude, because it lights for you the presence of the friend, burn up the candle – like it, in pain – and be merry.’ The candle, in other words, melts down in hot tears,” Hegel observes, “but in its sorrow it increases the glow of the flames” (1826a, Ms. 171).⁹³ The point here is to illustrate the unflappable good cheer of Hafiz’s poetic persona, but the image turns upon the lover’s sympathy with the candle, which becomes, in Hegel’s brief commentary, the protagonist of the scene, another self-sacrificial agent who abandons his particularity *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*. In their compaction and wit, their irreverent reverence and erotic charge, the poems Hegel cites as paradigms of objective humor remind me of nothing so much in nineteenth-century literature as the private variorum Emily Dickinson evolved in writing, rewriting, and stitching her poems together into the handmade editions she published herself.⁹⁴ Various threads remain to be followed out here: the loneliness from

91 Ibid.

92 These are the only two lines of the poem cited in the edition of lectures on the philosophy of religion published by Hegel’s students after his death. See xvii:274.

93 I have translated von Hammer-Purgstall’s translation of Hafiz: “Aus Dank, weil dich die Gegenwart des Freundes erhellt, verbrenn’ der Kerze gleich im Weh, und sei vergnügt” (Hafiz, *Der Diwan*, vol. II, 31).

94 Images of self-sacrifice are everywhere in Dickinson; see, for instance, “Split the Lark – and you’ll find the Music” (*Poems of Emily Dickinson*, 391; Franklin 905).

which God creates the world in “Wiederfinden” echoes that of “Die Freundschaft”;⁹⁵ the “simulative relationship” (1826b, Ms. 37a) of the rose to the nightingale in Persian verse seems of particular interest to Hegel; the long citation from Rumi in the closing pages of the *Encyclopedia* deserves comment as well. For the moment, however, a glance at two fairly lively and adventurous poems from the *Divan* has hopefully set to rest Bubner’s concerns that objective humor is an art without force or tension and has given the lie to Henrich’s remarks about an art of Biedermeier domesticity. Whether the *Divan* can satisfy Pippin, who charges Hegel with a “failure to imagine a post-romantic form of art (an outer form for a post-romantic understanding of freedom),” is harder to say. It is at least clear, I hope, that just such a form and such an understanding is what Hegel takes himself to have discovered in his remarks on the freedom in feeling of Italian poetry, the freedom of imagination in Persian verse, and the confluence of the two in a poem like “Wiederfinden.”⁹⁶

On the subject of the supposed Biedermeier conservatism of Hegel’s taste, consider as a final example the sixteenth-century shoemaker and Nuremberg poet, or *Meistersinger*, Hans Sachs. In his retellings of Genesis, Hegel observes, Sachs “has made into Nurembergers, in the strictest sense of the word, our Lord God, God the Father, Adam, Eve, and the Patriarchs.” Hegel praises the work’s “fresh perceptibility” and, yes, its “joyful heart,” but he concludes that though “there may seem something great in Hans Sachs’s audacity in being so familiar with God and these ancient ideas and, with all piety, assimilating them to the ideas of a narrow-minded bourgeoisie,” nevertheless the absurdity of imagining God as a German schoolmaster remains “a cultural and spiritual deprivation” and “a burlesque contradiction.” If the art of Humanus and the poetry of the *Divan* were really concerned with the translation of foreignness (Canaan, Persia) into homey bourgeois familiarity, then Sachs would be an ancestor of Goethe’s efforts. But cheerfulness must be earned, and Sachs’s crudity – “the naïveté of [his] not feeling, or not becoming conscious of, the contradiction between the topic and [the] way of making it the artist’s own” (LFA 265–6, XIII:344) – makes it impossible for his work to be taken seriously.

95 “Fühlte *Mangel* – darum schuf er Geister.” I am grateful to Terry Pinkard for this observation.

96 For what it’s worth, Kant’s favorite poet was the author of the *Rape of the Lock* and the *Essay on Man*. “There are two ways of disliking poetry,” Wilde remarked; “one way is to dislike it, the other is to read Pope.”

The effort to lend coherence to Hegel's view of modern literature has led us to overlook Schiller's lyric work almost entirely. This is excusable in part: Hegel offers no definite indication of his poetic legacy and fails to include his lyric work in the official history of late and post-romantic art that concludes Part Two, confining his discussions to the chapters on the respective genres instead. On the whole, Bungay seems right to speak of "Schiller's noble but limited success, and the crowning triumph of Goethe."⁹⁷ Like Schiller, Goethe had sought as well to reanimate modern literature with the example of the classical, and Schiller had classed him, famously, a naïve poet. Hegel quietly reverses the scheme: it is Goethe whose intense and inward feelings count as self-reflective, or sentimental, and Schiller whose sturdy voice and sober, Homeric style – "the most magnificent and harmonious words," prosody that is "simple, though striking" (LFA 1146, xv:461) – truly brings the classical naïve to life. While Goethe sings to himself, taking up the meaningless and making it meaningful, Schiller lends his songs "a deep content [*Gehalt*]" (1828, Ms. 151)⁹⁸ and addresses his findings to the polis.⁹⁹ What is classical in Schiller is ultimately his conviction that poetry can still address "the highest": namely, the ideas of freedom and fate, ancientness and modernity, that are typically pursued by professional philosophers. This ambition is both Schiller's achievement and his limitation. On the one hand, he has evolved a distinctive solution to the challenge of writing a poetry of ideas in an age of prose. As against the restlessness of the Jena school, "which in its ferment does violence to both art and thought because it oversteps one sphere without being, or being able to be, at home in the other,"¹⁰⁰ a "philosopher at peace with himself in his thinking may animate with his feeling his clearly grasped and systematically pursued thoughts,

97 *Beauty and Truth*, 179. Hegel calls Goethe "our greatest poet" in the first series of lectures, well before his interest in the *Divan* (1820, Ms. 182).

98 Accordingly, Hegel often cites Schiller's verse in the context of other arguments: for instance, "The Gods of Greece" (LFA 506–8, xiv:113), "Ideal and Life" (LFA 156, xiii:207), or the short poem "Multiplicity" (1826b, Ms. 3a). See LFA 1114, 1146, xv:420, 460.

99 As in his well-known "Lied von der Glocke," he "is a bard who recites a subject-matter dignified in itself to an assembly of all the best and most prominent people" (LFA 1147, xv:461).

100 Compare Baudelaire: "The more art strives to be philosophically clear, the more it will degrade itself and revert towards the primitive hieroglyph ... As we all know ... Germany is the country which has sunk deepest into the error of Philosophic Art" (*The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. J. Mayne [London: Phaidon, 1995]).

may give them visual illustration, and, as Schiller does in many of his poems, exchange the obviously necessary philosophical march and connection for the free play of particular aspects" (LFA 1128, xv:437). At the same time, Schiller's verse remains something of a hybrid; and if its "content is deep," the poetry itself is "often didactic" (1828, Ms. 151).¹⁰¹ If a philosophical lyric is called for, we would be better off with Wallace Stevens, the insurance vice-president who elaborated his metaphysics with a Persian languor.

Novel and drama

The central lines of the argument have now been followed out. Having offered a general statement of the project of lyric poetry in the last chapter, we have turned here to the particular works characteristic of a successful modern literature, including not only the *Divan* but the comic novels of Hippel and Sterne. What remain are two genres, the bourgeois epic and the bourgeois drama, the novel and the tragicomedy, that Hegel tends perhaps surprisingly to underplay. Not only have novels and plays thrived in the centuries since his death, but they offer just the sort of reconciling, heartfelt-but-cheerful outcomes that we might expect Hegel to approve. From our standpoint, it is of course a weakness or a curiosity of Hegel's theory that he fails to anticipate the centrality of the *Bildungsroman* to the future of European literature. But the fact that he does not suggests there is more to his position on the modern arts than, as some would have it, a rubber stamp for optimism and cheerfulness.

Tragicomedy, the generic hybrid to which Hegel refers simply as "drama" (1823, Ms. 285), instances of which are "plays [*Schauspiele*]," would appear to be the "appropriate form of drama for modern life."¹⁰² Having blended the objective, in the form of serious moral situations, with the subjective, in the form of comical and wayward characters, after all, the bourgeois drama builds to a scene of "forgiveness and the promise of reform" (LFA 1223, xv:569; cf. 1823,

101 Hegel praises the "Cranes of Ibycus," for instance, as a ballad of "magnificent words" that grasps "the deeper essential character" of its subject (LFA 1114, xv:420) – here, the Furies' inevitable revelation of a blood guilt. Still, the poem has none of the saving freedoms of the imagination; Schiller's ballads often give rise, in fact, to an "eerie [*schauerliche*] feeling which frightens the heart [*Brust*]" (1828, Ms. 151).

102 Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 435n106.

Ms. 285–6).¹⁰³ But while it is true that Hegel considers this the form of drama we can expect to deserve in the post-romantic era – not Schiller’s noble but ill-fated efforts to revive classical tragedy, and not August Schlegel’s hopes for a nationalist historical drama on the model of *Wallenstein*¹⁰⁴ – he considers the bourgeois tragicomedy a fairly dismal project.¹⁰⁵ “[T]he heart of [their] principle,” Hegel argues, “is the view that, despite all differences and conflicts of characters and their interests, human action can nevertheless produce a really fully harmonious situation” (LFA 1203, xv:532). Isn’t this the teaching of Hegel himself, the great revivalist of Leibnizian theodicy? Oughtn’t one to prefer, all things being equal, “a happy denouement” in a work of art (LFA 1232, xv:567)? The romantic comedy’s mix of tears and laughter would even seem to bear some resemblance to the blend of Italian feeling and Persian wit that Hegel praised in Goethe. Nonetheless, “despite the fact that it attempts to mediate the difference between tragedy and comedy,” the bourgeois drama is “of less striking importance” than its predecessors, and its chief exponents, Kotzebue and Iffland, are hacks (LFA 1202, xv:531).

We can account for Hegel’s disfavor in several ways. In the first place, the form of the bourgeois drama, a tragedy fitted with a comical, often conjugal denouement, has no clear project. The audience’s expectation of a tidy resolution weakens the force of the ethical collision while the pretension to serious subject matter – as in lyric, love is typically the problem – robs the drama of a genuinely comic freedom. Aiming to reconcile tragedy and comedy, drama merely ends up “blunting both sides.” The “tragic fixity of will is so far weakened, and

103 A.W. Schlegel’s term is “romantic drama” (*Vorlesungen*, I, 28), which he traces back to Shakespearean “romances” like *The Tempest*. Hegel finds its roots in “satyrical drama” and classical “tragicomedy” (LFA 1203, xv:531).

104 Historical drama is “the most dignified species of the romantic,” Schlegel writes. “In this field the most glorious laurels may yet be reaped by dramatic poets who are willing to emulate Goethe and Schiller. Only let our historical drama be in reality and thoroughly national; let it not attach itself to the life and adventures of single knights and petty princes, who exercised no influence on the fortunes of the whole nation. Let it, at the same time, be truly historical, drawn from a profound knowledge, and transporting us back to the great olden time. In this mirror let the poet enable us to see, while we take deep shame to ourselves for what we are, what the Germans were in former times, and what they must again be” (*Lectures*, Lecture 30).

105 Here he concurs with Wordsworth that “the invaluable works of our elder writers, I had almost said the works of Shakespeare and Milton, are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse” (*Lyrical Ballads* [Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2003], 249).

the depth of the collisions involved so far reduced," that a "reconciliation [*Aussöhnung*] of interests" is all too readily achieved (LFA 1203, xv:532). In Greece, tragedy had taken up the great issues of the day and, in general, the human "struggle against the enormous powers of nature."¹⁰⁶ Having subdued those powers, the modern nation-state has robbed tragedy of its urgency, a fact to which the bourgeois drama is the artistic accommodation. We can admire Schiller's efforts to write a national tragedy like *Wallenstein*, and we can sympathize with August Schlegel's call to place this national drama at the center of the modern arts, but in the end such theatrics are nostalgic and out of place. As we have seen, the national project belongs now to the lyric poets, not the dramatists; the nation is no longer a political entity but a temperament, a sort of inner weather.

Hegel puts the same point a different way by observing that there are virtually no constraints on the reception of a lyric poem. It can be read by anyone at any time in any place. And since fewer assumptions can be made about the prospective audience, less unity is to be expected in its collective judgment. "If a book [of poems] does not please me," Hegel notes, "I can lay it aside, just as I can pass by pictures or statues that are not to my taste, and in that case the author always has available ... the excuse that his book was not written for every Tom, Dick, or Harry." The situation with drama, however, is "quite otherwise," and the aesthete's indifference or antipathy to public opinion will not fly. The spectators at a play have "a right to bestow praise or blame ... as an assembled audience" which is "brought together ... for the purpose of pronouncing judgment" (LFA 1174-5, xv:496). Hegel probably has in mind here the ritual and religious, not to mention competitive, origins of the Greek dramatic spectacle. To succeed is, for the dramatist, to win over not the critics in the front row, but the entire assembled community. The greatness of classical drama is precisely this, that it expresses a point of view which, like a claim of reason, is either persuasive or not. In the chorus, whose importance Hegel finds underappreciated, "the public has found ... an objective representation of its own judgment on what is going on in front of it in the work of art" (LFA 1210, xv:541). And if the chorus stands in for the audience in its judgment of this action, it is clear that the rightness of this judgment is an all-or-nothing affair, and the dramatist's point of view a mandatory one. In coming to appreciate a body of lyric work, on

the other hand, we acquaint ourselves with a particular way of feeling and seeing which we are free to take up or reject as we see fit. The lyric thrives “especially . . . in modern times when every individual claims the right of having his own personal point of view and mode of feeling” (LFA 1124, xv:432). This difference between the availability of the poet’s outlook and the compulsoriness of the chorus’s judgment is, again, fundamental to Hegel’s sense of what has been lost and gained in the modernity of the arts.

Related reservations lie at the heart of Hegel’s critique of the novel, though his scattered remarks on the subject can make his views rather more difficult to parse than those on modern drama. Still, if it is hard to believe that Hegel’s discussion of the genre constitutes “the most dazzling pages in the *Aesthetics*,”¹⁰⁷ it is possible to reconstruct his argument. The first thing to note about this argument is how much it leaves out. We may permit Hegel’s decision to class the comic fiction of Sterne, Hippel, and Jean Paul as works of humor rather than novels proper.¹⁰⁸ (They earn serious consideration, at least, while Diderot’s *Jacques le Fataliste* and Rameau’s *Nephew*, a work that had featured famously in the *Phenomenology*, go unmentioned.) Meanwhile, Hegel’s relegation of the historical novel to a form of social history is likely to strike us as rather more severe.¹⁰⁹ And his indifference to the sentimental novel is frankly puzzling. Rousseau’s *Julie* is omitted entirely, while Goethe’s *Werther* and Jacobi’s *Woldemar* (another paradigm from the *Phenomenology*) are mentioned only in the context of the development of the beautiful soul (LFA 241–2, xiii:313). What is left is the *Bildungsroman*, the sub-genre to which Hegel devotes the whole of his scant systematic discussion of the novel form. To blame here is Hegel’s rather restrictive theory of poetic voices. While later critics would

107 J-M. Schaeffer, *Art of the Modern Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 155.

108 “Let us look at a few of the unclassified books lying on the boundary of ‘non-fiction’ and ‘literature,’” Northrop Frye writes. “Is *Tristram Shandy* a novel? Nearly everyone would say yes, in spite of its easygoing disregard of ‘story values.’ Is *Gulliver’s Travels* a novel? Here most would demur, including the Dewey decimal system, which puts it under ‘Satire and Humor’” (*Anatomy of Criticism* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957], 302).

109 “It was a correct instinct which sought to banish such portraiture of the particular and the gleaning of insignificant traits into the *Novel* (as in the celebrated romances of Walter Scott, etc.).” It is fitting, moreover, and thus a mark of “good taste,” that the historical novel marries its “unessential” pictures to a series of insignificant plots: the “subjective passions” of “romance tales” (PS 279, x:350). Good taste is not enough to merit a mention in the lectures on art, however.

follow Friedrich Schlegel in allowing the novel to float free of the traditional schema of epic, lyric, and dramatic poetry, Hegel grounds it firmly, and restrictively, in the first category. The task of epic is the delimitation of a “world,” a public way of life, and the singing of its founding deeds. *Wilhelm Meister* is the novel’s paradigm, then, because it is “the modern bourgeois epic” (LFA 1092, xv:392).

Hegel’s disillusion with the novel has two contingent sources and one substantive one. The first of the former, to which I return below, is that the novel is written in prose. The second contingent circumstance is a twofold historical pressure. On the one hand, for the advanced critical opinion of the day, the genre retained its eighteenth-century taints of immaturity, popularity, and femininity and was not to be taken seriously. (Kant had held that novel reading encourages poor mental hygiene – this despite his love of Rousseau and Sterne¹¹⁰ – and August Schlegel was still dismissing the genre in his 1802 lectures as a French and English ladies’ pastime.¹¹¹) On the other hand, the theorist who had claimed the greatest mandate for the novel was August’s younger brother, Friedrich. Unencumbered by generic constraints and freely self-determining, the novel was the form best suited to the “progressive, universal poetry” which is in turn the essence of modern literature.¹¹² Moreover, *Wilhelm Meister* was for Schlegel the greatest novel – one of the three “tendencies of the age” – precisely on account of its experimentation with the constraints of genre.¹¹³ Hegel may well have been put off by the fact that Schlegel had claimed the genre as such and the paradigm of the *Bildungsroman* for the ironists.¹¹⁴

Still, other considerations might have swayed him. Not only was *Meister* the work of modern Europe’s greatest artist, but his novel of education takes a long and searching look at the prose of life, unfolding

110 “Reading novels, in addition to causing many other mental discords, also has the result that it makes distraction habitual . . . The mind is . . . allowed to insert digressions . . . [a]nd the train of thought becomes *fragmentary*” (*Anthropology*, §47, Ak. VII:208).

111 *Vorlesungen*, II, 35.

112 “The keystone” of a “philosophy of poetry,” Friedrich had argued in the *Athenäum*, “would be a philosophy of the novel” (F. Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. P. Firchow [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991], 53; AF 252). For the famous definition of Romantic *Universalpoesie*, see *Philosophical Fragments*, 31; AF 116.

113 *Philosophical Fragments*, 46; AF 216. Schlegel would radicalize this play of genres in his own *Lucinde*.

114 In his 1798 review essay on *Meister*, Schlegel had argued that there was something so absolutely new about the novel that one could only come to understand it *aus sich selbst*, or on its own terms. The *Athenäum* puts it this way: “Whoever could manage

the whole baggy monster of which the Dutch genre picture is the distillate. This is the story of “an individual who pursues the universal goal as [if it were] his own. There are powers that oppose him, and he must grapple with them [*sich herumschlagen*]. The individual himself enters into the tangle of hindrances” (1828, Ms. 100a). Hindrances and their tangles are the stuff of modern art, after all, and Hegel gives high marks to another instance of the modern epic, Goethe’s verse “idyll” *Hermann und Dorothea*, for precisely this reason.¹¹⁵ Finally, there is the fact, made famous by Royce’s quip, that the procedures of the *Bildungsroman* are peculiarly well suited to Hegel’s own manner of thought and method of expression.¹¹⁶ Not only does the course of education body forth the labor of the negative, as the protagonist breaks with the naïve universal and explores his own particularity, but the story mounts to a climax in which, by “reconciling himself [*sich aussöhnen*] to his circumstances,” the novel finds its *Schluss* (LFA 1092–3, xv:393). As with the bourgeois drama, we should expect Hegel to embrace the bourgeois epic, to argue, say, that Wilhelm’s everyday errantry – running off to join the theater, which may as well be the circus – helps us see more clearly our own meandering efforts to come to terms with prosaic lives in a prosaic age. Why does this expectation go unmet?

The protagonist of the novel of education is a young man with a bit of Solger in him: a sense for his own unique individuality and a longing for the ideal. If he is to live in the world, he must reject the

to interpret *Wilhelm Meister* properly would have expressed what is now happening in literature. He could, so far as literary criticism is concerned, retire forever” (*Philosophical Fragments*, 15; CF 120). What was new in *Meister* was, for Schlegel, the “irony,” the modernist self-reflexivity, that “hovers over the whole work” (“On Goethe’s *Meister*” in J.M. Bernstein, ed., *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003], 279). According to Nicholas Saul, *Meister* was for Schlegel “a novel in which art was reflected upon with sovereign irony in art, and so finally emerged as a kind of meta-hero of the text” (“Goethe the Writer and Literary History,” in Sharpe, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Goethe*, 35). Not everyone agreed, Saul observes: Novalis thought *Meister* a mere “gospel of economics.”

115 A.W. Schlegel’s influential review praised the poem for its contemporaneity, for refusing to dredge up an outdated mythology, for treating politics obliquely (they are unpoetic) while focusing on the private lives of the middle class (*Sämtliche Werke*, xi: 183). Hegel’s own comments closely follow Schlegel’s (LFA 262, xiii:339; LFA 1110, xv:414). W. von Humboldt followed a year later with an entire monograph on the poem, praising Goethe’s perfect blend of (modern) sentiment and (ancient) naturalism.

116 Josiah Royce referred to the structure of the *Phenomenology* as that of a *Bildungsroman*.

bourgeois norms of his parents and fashion that world himself. Once upon a time, the struggle to bring a new world into being was the stuff of epic. "But in the modern world," Hegel remarks, "these struggles are nothing more than *Lehrjahre*" whose point "consists in this, that the subject sows his wild oats . . . enters the concatenation of the world, and acquires for himself an appropriate attitude to it." The novel is in this sense not the reincarnation of the epic, but, as in *Quixote*, its travesty.¹¹⁷ The hero has *imagined* that there is a world which needs creating. But in finding a job and fathering a family, he has acknowledged that the world he must inhabit is one he must inherit.¹¹⁸ Certain challenges remain, no doubt. But these involve the further education of his subjectivity, the forming and firming of his point of view. And that, of course, is a task for lyric. The novel is not a proper epic, but a hybrid and "subordinate" form (LFA 1091, xv:390).

This does not mean it is entirely without value. The novel's account of humdrum tribulations provides us with a "necessary corrective" to the "fantastic element" in which the young man's dreams reside (LFA 593, xiv:220; cf. 1826b, Ms. 55), and this reference to fantasy and to "the character of adventurousness" ties the novel to the chivalric romance from which, in Hegel's view, it springs. Hegel's interest in the novel of education as a corrective to fantasies of youth certainly recalls the satirical aims of Cervantes in *Quixote*. But *Wilhelm Meister* is also unlike *Quixote* in that it moves beyond its own critique to propose a positive model of the nature of modern life, and it is in this model of bourgeois decency that Hegel's basic dissatisfaction with the novel lies. In the end, "however much he may have quarreled with his world, or been pushed about in it," Hegel observes, "in most cases at last he gets his girl and some sort of position, marries her, and becomes as good a philistine as others" (LFA 593, xiv:220). This is not the lively embrace

117 Cervantes's novel, which tells of the collapse rather than the constitution of a world, is merely "novel-like [*Romanhaft*]" (1828, Ms. 100). Schelling had argued that *Don Quixote* and *Wilhelm Meister* were the only two real novels that had ever been written (*Philosophy of Art*, 234).

118 *Wilhelm Meister* itself is hardly as formulaic as Hegel makes it seem, of course. Setting aside the novel's formal complexities – its metafictional reflection on the meta-theatrical *Hamlet* and its mix of genres (most famously, in the story of the "beautiful soul") – it is worth noting that Wilhelm marries a refined noblewoman, not the girl next door, and that his friends are not suburban dads but the members of a secret freethinking vanguard, the "Society of the Tower." This is the same society that, intervening in the course of Wilhelm's apprenticeships (they send a Ghost to play opposite Wilhelm in *Hamlet*, for instance, thus allowing him to play the part more convincingly), makes it appear to the reader that his actions are not freely

of life, the *Sichseinleben* in one's tasks, made possible by the virtuosity of the Dutch brush. Wilhelm Meister is not a hearty burgher, but a hypocrite who has taken his comeuppance: "For now come children and the whole katzenjammer of life; he becomes a philistine, for [*da*] he had once fought against philistinism" (1826b, Ms. 55).

The burden of Hegel's critique rests here. The *Bildungsroman* offers us a salutary laugh at the expense of the dreamer. But if the dreamer proves in the end to be essentially uninteresting – a philistine – then what interest, finally, can we take in the formulaic rites of his passage to adulthood? In fact, the problem turns out to be the same here as in the bourgeois drama: the "moralizing plays" of Iffland and Kotzebue "usually en[d] in forgiveness and the promise of reform," but given that the protagonist is often "worthless from the start," Hegel argues, "conversion is only hypocrisy, or so superficial that it has not gripped his heart" (LFA 1233, xv:569). Tragicomedy does not offer "a genuinely poetic emotion" – tragic catharsis or comedic free play – "but only one that people ordinarily feel" (LFA 1204, xv:533). What people ordinarily feel, modern people at any rate, is the profoundly middling nature of the human character and its human affairs. Tragedy and epic were made possible by the existence of an aristocracy. But the protagonist of their modern incarnations, the drama and the *Bildungsroman*, is just an ordinary guy, a *guter Kerl* who lacks not only Iphigenie's moral purpose but Macbeth's purposeful wickedness. He is simply one of us; and it does us no good to know that. A genuine reconciliation would entail the interpenetration of the protagonist's particular passions (for the theater, for a particular girl) with the universal demands of the culture (a job, a wife). In becoming a philistine like the others, however, the protagonist's moment of particularity has collapsed without remainder into the universal.¹¹⁹ In this way, the novel may help us get *used* to modern life, but it does not teach us to *embrace* that life as a necessity or to make of it something we could truly call our own. Wilhelm's eventual slide back into convention is not an achievement, but an inevitability, a sort of statistic. If he comes to see how foolish he has been, and if this foolishness reminds us somewhat of ourselves,

chosen and thus ironizes the whole notion of the *Bildungsroman* as an achievement of freedom. If Hegel has ideas like this in mind in distancing himself from *Meister's* achievement, he does not mention them.

119 This is the reason, perhaps, that the accounts of both the drama and the novel speak in Hotho's edition not of a spiritual *Versöhnung* but of a commonplace and inartistic *Aussöhnung* (LFA 1203, xv:532; 1092–3, xv:393).

it may be good for a chuckle or two. But what do our opinions really matter? According to the novelist, we too are philistines.

It is the rare artist who manages, like Aristophanes or Hafiz, to discover freedom in the everyday, or, like Shakespeare and the Dutch painters, to manufacture that freedom himself. Common to all of these artists is that teeming creative energy expressed in paint as *Lebendigkeit* and on paper as the flights of figurative imagination. Hegel does not say as much, but given the reading of modern art and modern literature developed thus far, we can reasonably say that it is the lack of virtuosity, of the artist's own donation of vitality, that leaves the work of Iffland and Kotzebue limp. (And it is thus no surprise when the display of skill reasserts itself in the work of the performance: the sole virtue of the contemporary German theater, Hegel observes, is that it "manufacture[s] all sorts of opportunities for the actor to give a brilliant display of his accomplished virtuosity" [LFA 1205, xv:534; cf. 1190, xv:516]). From Hegel's standpoint, the same should hold true of the novel of education, whose slackness derives not only from the structure of its plot but the ordinary motions of its prose. According to the theory of genre, the novel must fail because the epic, with its class of princes and its founding deeds, is impossible in the modern world. But recall that the theory of painting had led Hegel to a similar prejudice – namely, that prosaic subject matter could never yield great art – that is decisively overturned by the example of Dutch art. In a conversation with Schiller, Goethe had identified as the central theme of the novel the creative response of individuals to lives of contingency and chance.¹²⁰ Hegel, as I read him, ought to agree, he simply thinks this creativity has not gone nearly far enough.

Whether he is right, whether *Wilhelm Meister* itself lacks imagination, remains open to debate. What is no longer in question is that the novel learned in the nineteenth century to discover its reconciliations not only domestically, in Austen's weddings, or sociologically, in Balzac's "comedy," but in the painterly brio of the prose. Here is E.M. Forster on one such virtuoso:

Probably the immense vitality of Dickens causes his characters to vibrate a little, so that they borrow his life and appear to lead one of their own. It is a conjuring trick . . . [and t]hose who dislike Dickens have an excellent case. He ought to be bad. He is actually one of our big writers, and his immense success with types suggests that there may be more in flatness than the severer types admit.¹²¹

120 Boyle, *Goethe: The Poet and His Age*, II, 269.

121 Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harcourt, 1927), 71–2.

Forster here describes precisely the sort of *Sichseinleben* in the artwork that Hegel praises in the paintings of the Dutch and in the lyrics of Goethe and Hafiz. For most of us today, Hegel's theory of the novel as *Bildungsroman* is too restrictive to be of much use, and his insistence on reconciliation rules out much we hold in high esteem. On its own terms, however, the failure of his account consists simply in its failure to acknowledge the place of writerliness and virtuosity in the realm of prose.

"In this prose his genius disappears," Hegel complains of Goethe's *Werther*.¹²² Literary self-sufficiency—language as art—requires a remarkably stringent view of form, and, as mentioned above, his inhospitality to the novel has something to do with the reified opposition of prose and verse. The poet takes into consideration a range of features of her use of language from which the prose author is typically exempt. In Nelson Goodman's terms, a work of art (e.g. a line drawing) is "relatively replete" with respect to a comparable piece of non-art (e.g. an electrocardiogram) insofar as the range of sensuous features that count as significant is broader in the former (including, e.g., the thickness of the line) than in the latter.¹²³ Poetry is relatively replete with regard to prose, in particular, insofar as it takes account of both the connotative and prosodic features of the language it employs. Hegel acknowledges that the unity verse affords an imaginative work is slight, for the substantive relationship between prosody and subject matter is vague at best: "an idea has only a very remote connection, or no inner connection at all, with the syllables used as purely arbitrary signs of a communication" (LFA 1012, xv:290). (In other words, he makes no attempt to argue that the dactyls and trochees of Homeric hexameter are more intrinsically heroic, say, than Shakespeare's iambic line, a sort of error sometimes known as the enactment fallacy.) Nevertheless, "sensuous existence is essential to art from the very beginning, and in poetry the sound of words must not remain so formless and vague as it immediately is in our casual speech, but must be given a living form" (LFA 1013, xv:291). Schelling, for instance, is more permissive here: prose can exhibit "a quiet rhythm and an ordered periodic structure" that picks up some of the features of verse.¹²⁴ For Hegel, however, the distinction is strict: "poetic prose is a hybrid" – a *Zwitterart* like

122 XI:731; cited by Gethmann-Siefert at "Einleitung (1823)," CCIX.

123 *Languages of Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 229–30.

124 *Philosophy of Art*, 231. A.W. Schlegel, meanwhile, explicitly rejects the novel's prose form as a possible debility: "Modern literature has from the very beginning incorporated a prosaic element ... From this it follows that there must be modern literary

diphthongs and platypuses (LFA 142, 148, XIII:189, 176) – “that is not suited to its task” (1823, Ms. 258).¹²⁵

What Hegel has wrong here are really facts, not principles. The point is not that the novel is a form of literature that simply abandons the constraints of style. Rather, or in the hands of some, it is a new form in which new kinds of constraint must be invented in order that they may be followed. In his *Maxims and Reflections*, Goethe seems to anticipate the lyrical possibilities of the form. “The novel is a subjective epic,” he offers, “in which the writer asks for permission to treat the world in his own particular way. The only question is whether he has a particular manner [*Weise*]; everything else will take care of itself.”¹²⁶ What is suggested here is the possibility of expressing in prose something like the persona or way of seeing that Hegel had considered so important in the lyric. And the invention of just such a manner is accompanied, in Flaubert, the century’s most famous stylist, with the attempt to create in prose something like the formal density, the “relative repleteness,” of verse. “I envision a style,” Flaubert writes to Louise Colet,

a style that would be beautiful, that someone will invent some day, ten years or ten centuries from now, one that would be rhythmic as verse, precise as the language of the sciences, undulant, deep-voiced as a cello, tipped with flame . . . Prose was born yesterday: you have to keep that in mind. Verse is the form par excellence of ancient literatures. All possible prosodic variations have been discovered; but that is far from being the case with prose.

And again:

What a bitch of a thing prose is! It’s never finished; there is always something to be done. However, I think it can be given the consistency of verse. A good prose sentence should be like a good line of poetry – *unchangeable*, just as rhythmic, just as sonorous. Such, at least, is my

genres whose natural, indeed essential form is prose. And thus the novel is positioned not as the conclusion and degradation of modern poetry, but as the first: a genre which can itself represent the whole. We will see that the great modern dramatists, indeed the entire form of our theater must be judged according to the principle of the novel” (*Vorlesungen*, III, 240–1).

125 For which reason it is not entirely acceptable to render the technical term *Poesie* as “literature,” since to the modern ear this conflates the distinction between versified and unversified literary forms.

126 *Goethes Werke*, XII:498; cited in M. Swales, “Goethe’s Prose Fiction” in Sharpe, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Goethe*, 129.

ambition (one thing I am sure of: no one has ever conceived a more perfect type of prose than I; but as to the execution, how many weaknesses, how many weaknesses, oh God!).¹²⁷

Conclusion

Did Hegel, as Pippin suggests, offer the framework by which the great artworks of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are to be understood, while failing in his discussions of particular paintings, poems, and novels to anticipate, even roughly, the forms that modernism would assume or the strategies it would adopt? The question is difficult to formulate – it tends to drift into counterfactuals about Hegel liking or disliking this or that modernist hero – much less answer. Still, one finds oneself keeping a sort of score.

Thus in [chapter 2](#) I suggested that Hegel would presumably have found room for abstract painting in his system on the grounds that he came around to abstraction in modern music despite a similar bias in favor of texted (and, in that sense, non-abstract) compositions. Moreover, given his insight that a world governed by institutions must limit the sense in which a life's coherence, or freedom, can be practically grasped, we must award him credit for anticipating the film and television subgenre of the bureaucratic comedy.¹²⁸ This is not likely to count as great art, however. Is there, then, a path from Hegel's enthusiasm for the *Divan* to *In Search of Lost Time*, or to *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*? It takes some doing. One can certainly find the spirit of Sterne's true humor in Joyce's great comedy,¹²⁹ and I have observed that the expansion of art's content Hegel sees in the art of everydayness, the restless modern ambition to include the whole of life, is taken up in *Dubliners* and radicalized in *Ulysses*. I suggested that Hegel, who insisted on the versification of literature, would have admired in Flaubert's fetishism of style the effort to bring the formal discipline of poetry to prose. And as for the alienation effects mandatory in modernism, we saw Hegel anticipating Mr. Shklovsky and his

127 *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert: 1830–1857*, ed. F. Steegmuller (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), II, 159 (April 24, 1852); II, 166 (July 22, 1852).

128 The blue-collar comedy of Chaplin's *Modern World* is superseded by the white-collar comedy of Billy Wilder's *The Apartment*, Gervais and Merchant's *The Office*, and so on.

129 Pillow makes this point (*Sublime Understanding*, 229).

circle in [chapter 3](#). Even Goethe's appropriations of world literature will have their echoes in the twenties. "[T]he artist," Hegel says in reference to his *Divan*, "is of course allowed to borrow his materials from distant climes, past ages, and foreign peoples . . . but at the same time he must use these forms only as frames for his pictures, while on the other hand their inner meaning he must adapt to the essential deeper consciousness of his contemporary world" (LFA 275–6, XIII:356). In just this spirit, Joyce models Bloom's day in Dublin on a ten-year journey home and Eliot shores a fragment of Sanskrit – the chilling "Shantih shantih shantih" that echoes over *The Waste Land* – against his ruins.

One can go on here. Hegel gets low marks for his conflation of the novel with the *Bildungsroman* and his failure to acknowledge the complexities of *Wilhelm Meister*. At the same time, his account of the neo-Persian poet's exaltation of the ordinary and expression of the national temper neatly anticipates Whitman (save for the free verse, which would have soured things), and I have noted that all of Hafiz's wit and much of his pantheism belong to that other American, Emily Dickinson. Borrowing selectively from the account of objective humor, it is even possible to arrive in the vicinity of Proust. The idea that the metamorphosis of an ordinary object into "a thing of the imagination" is the poet's task and the secret of his "joy" seems vaguely Proustian in that it anticipates the endless energy of reflection that Marcel or Swann will lavish upon a mere contingency – a boring lover, a memory of youth whose utter particularity threatens to alienate us until it is unexpectedly rescued, "raised up and, as it were, blessed," by that same energy of reflection.

Regrettably, however, I have no final, general answer to the question at hand. It seems rather severe to say that Hegel's imagination simply failed him when it came to an appraisal of the modern arts. And yet it would be useless to argue that he had seen the future. It is perhaps more true, in fact, that he keeps his gaze fixed on the past. My task in this study has been to retrieve and piece together anything of substance that Hegel says on the condition of painting and literature in the late and post-romantic eras. But it is worth noting that his lectures on art end not with a preview of the century to come, nor with a wish that art may continue to thrive, but, quite unapologetically, with the comedy of fifth-century Athens. One day early in September, 1826, Friedrich Carl Hermann Victor von Kehler and his classmate P. von

der Pfordten, the two students whose handwritten transcripts we have often relied upon, arrived to hear their professor deliver his final lecture of the term. The last words they wrote down were a sort of suggestion for further study: "Whoever has not yet read Aristophanes," Hegel had announced, "has not yet truly laughed" (1826b, Ms. 92). And that was all.

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